

DRYDEN'S ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESY

EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
LONDON AND GLASGOW

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
50 Old Bailey, London
17 Stanhope Street, Glasgow
BLACKIE & SON (INDIA) LIMITED
Warwick House, Fort Street, Bombay
BLACKIE & SON (CANADA) LIMITED
Toronto

Printed in Great Britain by Blackie & Son, Ltd., Glasgow

PREFACE

The text of the present edition of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* is based on that of the edition of 1693, the last published in Dryden's lifetime. It has not been thought advisable to preserve the old-fashioned punctuation, capitals, and italics. The spelling generally has been modernised, but such obsolete forms as prove a different pronunciation from that now in vogue, or are plainly something more than the whim of the writer or printer, have been retained, *e.g.* "undecent" and "balette". The paragraph arrangement of the original editions has been followed throughout, except in one instance (p. 47), where the argument seems to justify a slight alteration.

In the notes and introduction an attempt has been made to indicate Dryden's indebtedness to earlier writers, and the place occupied by the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* in the history of literary criticism.

The first appendix, containing a tabulated list of the chief alterations made by Dryden in the second edition of the *Essay*, may be found helpful in the study of the growth of Dryden's prose style; while the second appendix brings together the reply of Sir Robert Howard, which is somewhat difficult of access, and the retort from Dryden which this reply in turn called forth.

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INTRODUCTION

When the theatres were reopened in 1660, immediately after the Restoration, the English drama showed the unhappy effects of its suppression during the Commonwealth. With the exception of Shirley, all the greater men who had written before the closing of the theatres were dead, and the traditions of the older stage were in the keeping of those who had lost the spirit and power of the masters. Even the plays of the great Elizabethans did not suit the taste of Charles II's time.¹ The long exile of the Court in France had excited an interest in French literature, and especially in the drama, which, in the hands of Corneille and his fellows, was now achieving its highest excellence. Some critics were prompted by consideration of the unsatisfactory condition of the English stage to recommend the adoption of the rules and methods of the French plays and a general observance of the principles of the classical drama,² while others upheld the sufficiency of the national drama. In 1665, Dryden, who now for two years had been connected with the theatre, took the opportunity of reviewing the points at issue. This was the main purpose of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. "The drift of the ensuing discourse", he says in a prefatory note, "was chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before

¹ *Practice of the Ancients* (1678), and *A Short View of Tragedy, its Original Excellency and Corruption* (1693)

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them." The importance of the *Essay*, however, does not arise merely from its vindication of the English stage. In its preliminary discussion on the drama of Greece and Rome it anticipates the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns which was to assume such importance at the end of the seventeenth century; it may be regarded as a manifesto of the 'correct' poetry as well as of the rhymed tragedy of the Restoration; it attains to the highest level of pure criticism in its estimate of the Elizabethan drama, and particularly of Shakespeare; and, in the words of Dr. Johnson, it is our "first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing".

In May, 1665, the theatres were closed on account of the plague, and were not reopened till the end of the following year. Dryden passed most of the interval at Charlton in Wiltshire, the seat of his father-in-law, the Earl of Berkshire, and it was here, in all probability, that he employed his enforced leisure from dramatic work in writing, besides the *Annus Mirabilis*, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. It is usually said that the *Essay* was written in 1665. The opening sentences of the Dedication seem to corroborate this date. But there are certain statements which would argue that the concluding portion at least was not written before 1667. Dryden speaks of "these seven years"¹ since "his majesty's return", and he refers to the plague in a way which implies that it was then a thing of the past.² These passages may possibly owe their present form to a revision in 1667, or shortly before the whole essay was handed over to the publisher; but it is a question whether the plea for rhyme in the drama is not of later date than the remarks on the couplet and kindred matters in the prefatory letter to the *Annus Mirabilis*,³ which is dated November, 1666. In any case the *Essay* was not published till 1668.

The *Essay* is in dialogue form, three of the disputants being "persons whom their wit and quality have made known to all the town", and the fourth being Dryden himself. It

¹ P. 60, l. 26.² P. 61, l. 32.³ See note, p. 78.

cannot be positively proved whom Dryden's disputants represent, but there need be little doubt that Eugenius is the "borrowed name" of Lord Buckhurst, Lisideius of Sir Charles Sedley, and Crites of Sir Robert Howard, Dryden's brother-in-law.¹ The dialogue may have been adopted as the best means of giving a clear statement of opposite opinions, while the dramatic instincts of the author probably inclined him the more readily to a form by which vividness and interest were to be gained. Though Dryden succeeds in putting his own views as convincingly as possible, there is no sacrifice of fairness in the presentation of arguments with which he plainly disagrees. The late Mr Russell Lowell, after calling the *Essay* "by far the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English", remarked that "the fairness with which each side of the argument is treated shows the breadth of Dryden's mind perhaps better than any other one piece of his writing. There are no men of straw set up to be knocked down again, as there commonly are in debates conducted upon this plan."² One great reason of this fairness in Dryden's presentation of arguments which he combats is that he generally borrowed from critical works in which these arguments had been advanced. Crites's condemnation of the heroic couplet as the verse of the drama, for instance, is reproduced from Sir Robert Howard's Preface to *Four New Plays*, published in 1665; and the discussion on the principles of the French stage is largely founded on Corneille's *Discours dramatiques*, which had appeared in 1660. The prefatory remark that the *Essay* was "written in the country without the help of books" is not to be taken literally. Doubtless Dryden was unable to enhance his arguments with all the references and illustrations he could wish, or he may not have had the means, even had he

¹ See notes, p. 1, ll. 17, 20.

² Essay on Dryden in *My Study Windsor*. Cf. Dr Johnson, *Life of Dryden*. "It will not be easy to find, in all the opulence of our language, a treatise so artfully variegated with accurate representations of opposite probabilities, so enlivened with imagery, so brightened with illustrations."

cared to use them, of verifying all his statements and quotations; but there can be no doubt that he wrote part of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* with Corneille's *Discours* and Howard's Preface lying open before him. His later statement on the composition of the *Essay*, that it is "a little discourse in dialogue, for the most part borrowed from the observations of others",¹ is evidently more trustworthy. We shall not be far wrong, indeed, in considering the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* as a sort of *compte rendu* of the dramatic theories of the day.² This characteristic of the *Essay* serves to increase its historical importance, without in the least detracting from Dryden's credit for its composition. He has not merely given a fair statement of antagonistic views, but he has placed their salient points in skilful opposition; while the arguments which are borrowed are often bettered in the borrowing. This is particularly noticeable in Dryden's rendering of Sir Robert Howard's attack on rhyme.³

There is some reason to believe that the non-controversial part of the *Essay*—viz. the criticism of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson, and the Examen of the *Silent Woman*—was suggested by a *Short Discourse of the English Stage*⁴ which Richard Flecknoe had published in 1664. Flecknoe ended his few remarks by saying, "thus much suffices it briefly to have said of all that concerns our modern stage, only to give

¹ *Defence of the Essay*, Appendix, p. 129.

² Malone points out that Martin Clifton, in his letters on Dryden's poems (published 1687, written apparently about 1674), says that the *Essay* was "stolen from Mons. Hedelin, Menardine, and Corneille". It may safely be said that the *Essay* owes nothing to the *Poétique* (1640) of Jules de la Mesnardière. What it has in common with the *Pratiqué du Théâtre* (1657) of François Hedelin, abbé d'Aulignac (cf. note, p. 20, l. 10), is due merely to the similarity of subject: it cannot be shown that any of Dryden's statements were directly suggested by D'Aulignac. Had Dryden been indebted to these works, we may be sure he would not have failed to mention them. There are about twenty references to Corneille in the *Essay*, and indebtedness to the *Discours dramatiques* is acknowledged at least seven times.

³ See note, p. 62, ll. 23, &c.

⁴ The *Short Discourse* was printed with Flecknoe's *Love's Kingdom*, a pastoral tragi-comedy, 1664. It is reprinted in *The English Drama and Stage under the Tudor and Stuart Princes* (Roxburghe Library, 1869). Its influence on Dryden was suggested by Genest, *English Stage*, x. 252.

others occasion to say more"; and it is an interesting conjecture that it was a writer whom Dryden despised and mercilessly satirised who gave him the idea of writing the magnificent estimate of Shakespeare and his fellows. Flecknoe appears to better advantage in this *Short Discourse* than his reputation as an author, for which Dryden is largely responsible, would lead us to expect. "There are few of our English plays, excepting only some few of Jonson's," he says, "without some faults or other; and if the French have fewer than our English, 'tis because they confine themselves to narrower limits, and consequently have less liberty to err. . . . To compare our English dramatic poets together, without taxing them, Shakespeare excelled in a natural vein, Fletcher in wit, and Jonson in gravity and ponderousness of style; whose only fault was he was too elaborate; and had he mixed less erudition with his plays, they had been more pleasant and delightful than they are. Comparing him with Shakespeare, you shall see the difference betwixt nature and art; and with Fletcher, the difference betwixt wit and judgment." Flecknoe's estimate has several points in common with Dryden's; and it is perhaps not too fanciful to note that while Flecknoe describes what is meant by 'wit', Dryden enlarges on the subject of 'humour'. The somewhat casual remarks of the *Short Discourse* are not for a moment to be set in comparison with the full and masterly criticism of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, but it is probable that the one had a direct influence on the other, and some colour is given to this conjecture by the fact that Dryden's account of the Elizabethans is more or less an excursus from the general plan of the *Essay*.

It is probable, too, that Dryden's indebtedness to Corneille was not confined merely to the matter of the *Essay*. In 1660 the French dramatist had brought out a complete edition of his works, containing *Examens* of his plays as well as three carefully reasoned *Discours*¹ on the principles of the French

¹ 'Sur le poëme dramatique', 'Sur la tragédie', and 'Sur les trois unités'

and classical drama. While the *Examens* served as a pattern to the critical prefaces and dedications which Dryden published with his plays, the *Discours* may have suggested to him a deliberate treatise, dealing not with any particular play, but with the current theories of dramatic art in general. And the fact that there were statements in the *Discours* which he could use against those who decried the methods of the English stage,¹ and also that he had much to urge against the French drama as represented by the plays of Corneille himself, may have prompted him the more readily to write his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

There are three main discussions in the *Essay*, viz. the relative merits of ancient and modern poetry, more especially with reference to the drama, the relative merits of the French and English drama, and the advisability of substituting rhyme for blank verse in English tragedy. The first question is discussed by Crites and Eugenius. Crites argues that poetry was held in greater esteem by the ancients. The drama was then a state-institution, and honours were decreed to the successful poet, whereas the moderns have no such incentive, and the reputation of a poet is too unprofitable. The ancients were more faithful imitators of nature. All the rules of the drama, such as the three unities of time, place, and action, are taken from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry*, and few modern plays would stand the test of these rules. If the ancients contrived well, they must be acknowledged to have written better. Probably if their lost works were recovered, the controversy would at once be decided in their favour; still, one's admiration of their extant plays is only increased when these are compared with the plays of the moderns. Further, if we understood them perfectly we should admire them more than we do, for we doubtless lose much of their wit. The greatest man of the last age, Ben Jonson, admitted their superiority,

¹ E.g. p. 47, ll. 20, &c.

and imitated and borrowed from them. So the best and worst of modern poets should equally instruct us to admire the ancients.

Eugenius replies that the moderns have profited by the example of the ancients. We want neither veneration nor gratitude, but we have not been content to imitate them. We draw not after their lines, but those of nature; and as we have had the advantage of their experience, we have surpassed them. Many of the rules which Crites says we owe to the ancients were not known to them. The unity of place was not one of their rules, and the unity of time was not always strictly observed; and they have less reason to be excused for not observing the decorum of the stage, as the same poet, unlike the modern dramatist, did not write tragedies and comedies promiscuously. Their tragedies always dealt with some well-known subject, and so never gave the pleasure of novelty, and the plots of the Roman comedies, which were generally borrowed from the Greeks, were all very similar. As to the remark that we lose much of their wit, it is to be remembered that though we may miss the application of a proverb or a custom, yet a thing well said will be wit in all languages. Their tragic poets dealt only with lust, cruelty, revenge, and ambition, and entirely neglected the subject of love, and the love passages which are occasionally to be found in their comedies are unnatural and inartistic.

This discussion of Crites and Eugenius is of considerable interest in the history of literary criticism, as it deals with a subject which twenty years later was to divide the French Academy, and become a matter of almost European controversy. The Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns began in Italy, and is said to have arisen out of the debate on the pre-eminence of Tasso or Ariosto. It was introduced into France about 1635 by Boisrobert. His attack on the ancients is now lost, but it seems to have dealt chiefly with the theatre, a pressing topic in the time of Richelieu and

Chapelain.¹ From 1670, by which time the authority of the ancients was fully established in France, Desmarets de La Rivière renewed the attack in a series of treatises exalting the ancients and attacking the moderns. But the quarrel first assumed serious proportions with Charles Perrault, who championed the moderns in his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1697). In this work the ancients were defended by Boileau. What is of particular interest to us is that Dryden had dealt with their merits by 1668, and not in any spirit of partisanship, for his sympathies were with the moderns; and some of the arguments which he adduced, on one side or the other, were similar to those which were to be urged in the great controversy of Perrault and Boileau. The discussion of Criticism in *Eugenius* may have been suggested to Dryden by the Italian or French critics who had impugned the authority of the ancients; but no foreign influence is to be detected in the setting or handling of this discussion, and it is more than likely that the idea of it arose from an independent comparison of the principles of the English and French drama. Dryden's critical work as a whole entitles him to be considered the leader of the modern school in England; but, unlike so many of the moderns, he had too much judgment to fail to give the ancients their due.

In the second main discussion of the *Essay*, La Motte praises the French stage at the expense of the Italian. The French, he argues, have observed better than any other nation the rules of the three unities. They do not burden themselves with underplots like the English, nor have anything so absurd as the English tragi-comedy. The English, in cramping the business of many years of representation of two hours and a half, draw no more than a miniature, and offend against truth and verisimilitude.

¹ See note p. 22, line 10, for a list of the works of Desmarets de La Rivière.

French represent only so much of the story as is sufficient to constitute one whole and great action, and are accordingly better able to attend to the literary and artistic graces. They avoid the representation of duels and battles on the stage (than which nothing can be more ridiculous) by means of narrations. A good description of a death will make a deeper 'impression of belief' than the finest acting, and only those actions should be represented which will appear with the greatest beauty. The French are never so inartistic as to end their plays with a conversion or simple change of will, while the reason of an actor's entrance or exit is always made apparent. Lastly, the French plays have the advantage of being written in rhyme.

Neander begins his reply by admitting that the French make their plots more regular and observe the decorum of the stage more exactly than the English, but he asserts that they are inferior in the portrayal of humour and passion. He defends *tragi-comedy* on the ground that contraries, when placed near, set off each other. As to underplots, they do not infringe the unity of action if they are subservient to, and conduce to, the main design. Single plots deprive the French plays of the variety and copiousness of the English; nor do they seem to facilitate or improve the description of the passions, as the French speeches are too often tiresome declamations. It is right that violent or incredible actions should be related, though there is no logical reason against fights being represented on the stage, for it is as easy to believe that blows are there given in earnest as that those who strike them are kings or princes, or the persons whom they represent; but if the English show too much action, the French show too little. By their servile observation of the rules of the stage, the French have brought on themselves many inconveniences and absurdities, as well as dearth of plot and narrowness of imagination. In conclusion, two things are to be affirmed of the English drama. that many of our plays are as regular as any of the French, and have

besides more variety of plot and characters; and that most of our irregular plays show a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing than any of the French.

The debate of Lisideius and Neander on the French and English stage amounts to a comparison of the principles of the classical and romantic drama. The rules of the classical drama were founded on the practice of the Greek and Roman poets, but they owe much—practically all their rigid and formal elements—to the academic critics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It was under their influence that Sir Philip Sidney objected to “mongrel tragedy-comedy”, and considered the play of *Gorboduc* “faulty in time and place, . . . for when the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time pre-supposed in it should be, both by Aristotle’s precept and by common reason, but one day, there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined”. Much of his *Apologie for Poetry* was borrowed directly from the Italian critics, and in particular from Castelvetro, the translator and commentator of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and the real founder of the rules of the three unities.¹ Ben Jonson did not apply the dramatic rules as rigidly as Sidney, the student of the critics, had recommended. He modelled his plays directly on the Greek and Roman drama, and paid little attention to the theorizings and refinements of Aristotle’s commentators, though he was not by any means unacquainted with them. He had the critical insight to see that the unity of action was alone indispensable, and that the unity of time was of secondary importance. “The fable is called the imitation of one entire and perfect action”, he says in his *Discoveries*, which Dryden praises so highly, “whose parts are so joined and knit together, as nothing in the structure can be changed, or taken away, without impairing or troubling the whole. . . . It behoves the action in tragedy or comedy to be let grow till the necessity ask a conclusion; wherein two things are to be

¹ See note, p. 20, ll. 13, &c.

considered: first, that it exceed not the compass of one day; next, that there be place left for digression and art." Of the unity of place Jonson said little, perhaps because there is no mention of it in Aristotle; and though he usually observed it, and condemned the flagrant infringements of it in the romantic drama, he sometimes allowed himself a greater latitude than the French critics or poets would have commended. As to underplots, he did not condemn them as long as they were part of, or coherent with, the main story.¹ Milton's *Samson Agonistes* likewise illustrates the tendency of the English classical play to be modelled directly on the ancient drama. As it was not intended to be represented, it has no place in the history of the stage, but it helps to prove, if only by its prefatory note, that the real introduction of the critics' dramatic rules dates from after the Restoration.²

In practice Dryden showed a certain tendency to conform to the rules of the French stage. At times he was proudly defiant of them in following the traditions of the national drama, while at others he observed "the exactest rules by which a play is wrought"³ and declared himself entirely in favour of the 'regular' style of writing.⁴ No stress, however, is to be laid on an isolated statement of his dramatic views, as his theories varied with his practice; still, we have at times the suspicion that Dryden had the consciousness of sinning when he did not observe the unities. He generally compromised by following them at a distance, to use his own words; and he did so for two reasons, which he himself gives, because 'the English cannot bear too regular a play', and because 'it is better to trespass a rule than leave out a beauty'.⁵ On the whole he inclined to curtailing the time and place as much as the action would reasonably

¹ See note, p. 13, l. 29

² Though not published till 1671, *Samson Agonistes* like all Milton's work, is plainly pre-Restoration in quality

³ Prologue to the *Maiden Queen*, 1667

⁴ In the *Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, 1679.

⁵ See the preface to *Don Sebastian*, 1690.

allow, but he saw the disadvantages of confining the action within arbitrary limits.¹ His attitude to double-plots showed a like inconstancy. French influence led him occasionally to cast doubt on their advisability, and he admits sometimes that single-plots are "the natural and true way".² But though he professes to indulge in underplots merely because they suit the taste of the English public, he did not in his heart condemn them, for they were a marked characteristic of the English stage, and were approved of, moreover, by Ben Jonson, the great representative of the 'regular' drama. Much the same is to be said of his attitude to tragi-comedy, though on the whole he regarded it with more uniform favour; he never directly controverted what he had said in its defence in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.³ It is indeed remarkable that though the *Essay* was written at the beginning of Dryden's career, it gives a very fair representation of his general views on the conflicting theories which he discussed, with approval or disapproval, during a period of about thirty years. The rest of his dramatic criticism takes the form mostly of prefaces, and the opinions expressed therein were generally dictated by the accompanying play. He wrote his play first according to his fancy, and then in a preface contrived to work into a more or less general treatise on dramatic art a justification of the methods which he had adopted; he did not define beforehand the principles on which his play should be written, and then proceed to apply them. The result is that his prefaces are

¹ The best expression of his views on the vexed question of the three unities occurs in the *Disfence of the Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Appendix, pp. 140-144.

² In the preface to *Cleomenes*, 1692, where he adds that single-plots are "not to the genius of the nation". Cf. also the later preface to *Love Triumphant*, 1694: "We love variety more than any other nation; and so long as the audience will not be pleased without it, the poet is obliged to humour them. On condition they were cured of this public vice, I could be content to change my method, and gladly give them a more reasonable pleasure."

³ In the preface to *Don Sebastian*, 1690, he defended tragi-comedy, like double-plots, on the ground of popularity: as "the English will not bear a thorough tragedy", the dramatist must intermingle the "allay of comedy" (see the preface to the *Maiden Queen*, published 1668).

too often pieces of special pleading, and of little value as expressions of his real views. But there was no ground for special pleading in the discussion of dramatic principles in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. It is essentially 'sceptical', as Dryden says in the *Defence*; he is content to relate different opinions, without trying to reconcile them; and though there is no mistaking how his sympathies lie, the careful statement of opposing arguments shows that his sympathies are deliberate. It is not too much to say that the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* exhibits Dryden's fundamental views on the principles of the drama, and that such variations in his opinions on these matters as are to be found in his later dramatic criticism are for the most part surface variations.

The third discussion arises out of references made by Lisideius and Neander to the verse of the drama. Crites objects to their agreeing that rhyme is proper for the English stage. It is unnatural, he argues, for dramatic dialogue is presented as the effect of sudden thought, and no man speaks in rhyme without premeditation. As Aristotle says, that kind of verse is fittest for the drama which is nearest the language of ordinary discourse; and this with us is blank verse. It is said that the quickness of repartees in argumentative scenes receives an ornament from verse. But what is more unreasonable than that a man should light not only on the wit, but on the rhyme too, upon the sudden? Such verses appear rather like the design of two than the answer of one. Rhyme is incapable of expressing the greatest thoughts naturally, and it is unsuited to express common matters, such as commands to servants. It is said that verse circumscribes a quick and luxuriant fancy. Yet this would prove that we may write better in verse, but not more naturally; nor indeed does it prove this, for he who wants judgment to confine his fancy in blank verse may want it as much in rhyme, and he who has it will avoid errors in both.

Neander replies that Crites has condemned rhyme in

general from the faults or defects of ill rhyme. He has not proved that rhyme is unnatural in itself, or, if natural, is not proper for a play. The choice and right disposition of apt words is sufficient to make rhyme natural in itself. It is only a bad or lazy writer who will make one verse for the sake of another, or be forced by the necessity of rhyme to say what he would not otherwise have said. If, then, verse may be made natural in itself, how becomes it unnatural in a play? As to the quotation from Aristotle, couplet verses may be rendered as near prose as blank verse can by the use of the hemistich or by *enjambement*; and the couplet may at times be discarded for Pindarics. The excellence of the Elizabethans in blank verse is a good argument for us not to write at all, or to attempt some other way; and the way of writing in rhyme has alone been left free to us. It must be remembered that a serious play, to be like nature, is representation of nature wrought up to a higher pitch, and heroic rhyme is the most suitable as being the noblest kind of modern verse. It is true that verse is not the effect of sudden thought; but this is no reason why sudden thoughts may not be represented in verse. Neander then refutes the argument against repartee in rhyme, and the observation that rhyme is unsuited to express common commands and such ordinary matters, and ends by affirming that rhyme is a great help to a luxuriant fancy.

Dryden had already defended the use of rhyme in the drama in the Preface to his *Rival Ladies* (1664). He there maintained that "the way of writing scenes in verse was 'not so much a new way amongst us as an old way new revived'". He makes a similar assertion in this, repudiating the charge of imitation of the French drama and alluding to English precedents before Shakespeare. though rhyme had been used by Davenant in the *of Rhodes* before the Restoration, there is little doubt of the adoption of the heroic couplet as the ve

English tragedy after 1660 was prompted by, if not due to, the example of the French drama.¹ The debate on the relative merits of rhyme and blank verse seems to have been fairly wide-spread.² Dryden's part in it was predominant. His plays soon established the heroic couplet for a while as the verse of the drama, and he made the chief contribution to the theory of the question in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. As an answer to the arguments of Critics, Neander's defence is sound. He certainly proves that none of the arguments urged against the couplet were adequate, and he also succeeds in showing that the couplet is, theoretically, suitable: practice alone could show him its shortcomings. The ornamental qualities of rhyme which Dryden urges in its favour are really a source of danger.³ They are apt to distract the attention of the audience from the ideas the poet is expressing, and there is the more serious risk that the poet himself may be led to think more of his manner than his matter.⁴ The difficulty of finding rhymes may circumscribe a quick and luxuriant fancy, but it is more likely, on the other hand, to curb the imagination and defeat 'the lively representation of passions and humours'. Dryden

¹ This is confirmed by a statement of the Earl of Orrery see note, p. 71, l. 25. In a letter to a friend, he says of his *Black Prince* "I have now finished a play in the French manner, because I heard the king declare himself more in favour of their way of writing than ours. . . . It is wrote in a new way (quoted in the preface to his *Dramatic Works* 1737).

² Thus Blackmore the Elogist of the *Essay* says in an epilogue written for the revival of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*

After many a long and free debate,
For diverse weighty reasons 'twas thought fit
Ursely sense should still to rhyme submit.
This the most wholesome law we ever made, &c.

Sir Robert Howard (see notes, p. 62, ll. 23, &c.) alludes to "the dispute between many ingenious persons".

³ *E.E.* p. 67, ll. 30-35.

⁴ Dryden admits as much in his *Dedication of the Arctus* 1697: "Rhyme is certainly a constraint even to the best poets, and those who make it with most ease; though perhaps I have as little reason to complain of that hardship as any man, excepting Quarles and Wither. What it adds to sweetness, it takes away from sense; and he who loves the least by it may be called a gambler; it often makes us swerve from an author's meaning."

shows that there is no reason why rhyme should not be 'natural'; but his own heroic plays prove that he was unable to carry his precepts invariably into practice. The continued necessity of rhyme tended unmistakably to produce an affected style of expression, or at least to modify the natural expression in some way or other; and it is a question whether it did not tend, even in Dryden's masterly hands, to modify the tone of the thought itself, though, as he stated, it was only a bad or lazy writer who would let the rhyme suggest the thought.¹ Dryden temporarily abandoned the use of rhyme after writing the *Indian Emperor* (1665), because he found it "troublesome and slow".² Ten years later he abandoned it finally for a deeper reason. In the Prologue to *Aureng-zebe* (1675), his last rhymed play, he feels constrained to admit that

Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
And Nature flies him like enchanted ground.

The use of the heroic couplet as the verse of the drama, however good in theory, had not stood the test of practice.

Dryden's plea for the heroic couplet has the secondary importance of stating the views and aims of the 'correct' school of poetry. "There is both care and art", says Dryden, "required to write in verse. A good poet never establishes the first line till he has sought out such a rhyme as may fit the sense, already prepared to heighten the second. . . . However good the thought may be, however apt the words in which 'tis couched, yet he finds himself at a little unrest while rhyme is wanting; he cannot leave it till that comes naturally, and then is at ease, and sits down contented. . . . The last and most mature product of those thoughts [is] artful and laboured verse." But it is not

¹ Cf. Prof. Ward's *English Dramatic Literature*, iii, p. 317. If Dryden's form of the couplet, says Prof. Saintsbury, "is not good, no other is in English possible, for dramatic use" (*Short Hist. of English Literature*, p. 485).

² See notes, Dedication, l. 19.

merely in the defence of rhyme that Dryden enunciates those ideals of versification which he and Pope were yet to realize. The introductory portion of the *Essay* is perhaps of greater importance in this respect from its allusions to contemporary poetry, and especially to the founders of the correct school. In the comparison of the two unnamed writers who represent the 'extremities of poetry', Dryden condemns, on the one hand, the debased metaphysical school, and, on the other, the unimaginative poetaster who has no gift of expression or of verse-mechanism. He praises the verses of Suckling as being "courtly writ", and showing "the conversation of a gentleman", of Waller as "even, sweet, and flowing", of Denham as "majestic and correct", and of Cowley as "elevated, copious, and full of spirit". This is a full catalogue of the qualities which the correct school of poetry endeavoured to attain in their precise and cultured couplet. And in all the history of the school we have no simpler statement of its more technical aims than that which Dryden gives us at the beginning of his first critical work,— "to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words, to retrench the superfluities of expression, and to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it". But though Dryden more than anybody else determined the principles of this school, he was not blind, like so many of his literary descendants, to the merits of those who had cherished other ideals.

The estimate of Shakespeare is alone sufficient to place Dryden among the greatest of English critics. No portion of his writings has been more uniformly praised; and modern editors and admirers of Shakespeare, as Dr Johnson said, can only expand and paraphrase "this epitome of excellence". Its excellence is the more surprising when we take into account what Shakespeare's reputation then was. The more detailed criticisms of Fletcher and Ben Jonson show the same sympathetic in-

sight, and if they just miss the same degree of excellence, the reason would seem to be that these poets had not the charm of the "divine" Shakespeare's "comprehensive soul". Dryden judged the Elizabethans not by the literary standards of a school, but by those higher standards which know no fashion. He is frequently careless in his facts. Some of his statements about Fletcher and Ben Jonson are now known to be incorrect, just as his historical references to the use of rhyme are full of error. But if he is not trustworthy in matter of detail, his judgments will seldom be disputed. Dr. Johnson has said that "the criticism of Dryden is the criticism of a poet", because of its more external characteristics, "the author proving his right of judgment by his power of performance"; but it is equally so because of its remarkable power of sympathetic and intuitive appreciation. His acuteness of observation, and his faculty of distinguishing the essential qualities of a writer, are apparent throughout this *Essay*, in the comparison of the 'two extremities of poetry' and of Donne and Cleveland, as well as in the more studied criticism of the Elizabethan dramatists.

Taken as a whole, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* marks the beginning of a new development in English literary criticism. The Elizabethan critics had dealt mostly with the external matters of literature, classifying the figures of speech, the kinds of metre, and the literary forms, or discussing the rules of versification. Sir Philip Sidney had risen above the merely rhetorical and prosodic in his defence of poetry as an art, while Ben Jonson had used the study of classical literature as an aid to creation. But the essential tone of all this criticism was didactic. With Dryden criticism becomes theoretic and comparative. The *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* recounts "a dialogue sustained by persons of several opinions, all of them left doubtful, to be determined by the readers in general".¹ By placing

¹ *Defence of the Essay*, Appendix, p. 138.

his readers on the same level as himself, Dryden freed criticism of its didactic character; and by recognizing that there were different methods and principles in literature, and by investigating them and weighing their merits, he established comparative criticism. Moreover, as a consequence of these changes, he raised criticism to the dignity of an art, and established it as a distinct literary form. And for these reasons he is worthy to be called, in the words of his great successor in the eighteenth century, "the father of English criticism".

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CHARLES EARL OF
DORSET AND MIDDLESEX, LORD CHAMBERLAIN
OF THEIR MAJESTIES' HOUSEHOLD, KNIGHT OF
THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER, &c.

5 My Lord,

As I was lately reviewing my loose papers,
amongst the rest I found this Essay, the writing of
which, in this rude and indigested manner wherein your
lordship now sees it, served as an amusement to me in
10 the country, when the violence of the last plague had
driven me from the town. Seeing then our theatres
shut up, I was engaged in these kind of thoughts with
the same delight with which men think upon their
absent mistresses. I confess I find many things in this
15 discourse which I do not now approve; my judgment
being not a little altered since the writing of it; but
whether for the better or the worse, I know not: neither
indeed is it much material in an essay where all I have
said is problematical. For the way of writing plays in
20 verse, which I have seemed to favour, I have, since that
time, laid the practice of it aside, till I have more
leisure, because I find it troublesome and slow. But I
am no way altered from my opinion of it, at least with
any reasons which have opposed it. For your lordship
25 may easily observe that none are very violent against it
but those who either have not attempted it, or who have
succeeded ill in their attempt. 'Tis enough for me to
have your lordship's example for my excuse in that
little which I have done in it; and I am sure my
30 adversaries can bring no such arguments against verse
as those with which the fourth act of *Pompey* will furnish
me in its defence. Yet, my lord, you must suffer me a

little to complain of you that you too soon withdraw from us a contentment, of which we expected the continuance, because you gave it us so early. 'Tis a revolt, without occasion, from your party, where your merits had already raised you to the highest commands, and where 5 you have not the excuse of other men, that you have been ill used, and therefore laid down arms. I know no other quarrel you can have to verse than that which *Spartina* had to his beauty, when he tore and mangled the features of his face only because they pleased too 10 well the sight. It was an honour which seemed to wait for you, to lead out a new colony of writers from the mother nation, and upon the first spreading of your ensigns, there had been many in a readiness to have followed so fortunate a leader; if not all, yet the better 15 part of poets.

*Pars indocilis melior grege, mollis et expes
Inominata perfrimat cubilia*

I am almost of opinion that we should force you to accept of the command, as sometimes the prætorian 20 bands have compelled their captains to receive the empire. The court, which is the best and surest judge of writing, has generally allowed of verse; and in the town it has found favourers of wit and quality. As for your own particular, my lord, you have yet youth and 25 time enough to give part of them to the divertisement of the public, before you enter into the serious and more unpleasant business of the world. That which the French poet said of the temple of Love, may be as well apphed to the temple of the Muses. The words, as near as I 30 can remember them, were these

*Le jeune homme a mauvaise grâce,
N'ayant pas adoré dans le temple d'Amour,
Il faut qu'il entre et pour le sage,
Si ce n'est pas son vrai séjour,
C'est un gîte sur son passage*

25

I leave the words to work their effect upon your
(M 682)

lordship in their own language, because no other can
so well express the nobleness of the thought; and wish
you may be soon called to bear a part in the affairs of
the nation, where I know the world expects you, and
6 wonders why you have been so long forgotten; there
being no person amongst our young nobility, on whom
the eyes of all men are so much bent. But, in the
mean time, your lordship may imitate the course of
nature, who gives us the flower before the fruit: that I
10 may speak to you in the language of the Muses, which I
have taken from an excellent poem to the king:

As Nature, when she fruit designs, thinks fit
By beauteous blossoms to proceed to it;
And while she does accomplish all the spring,
15 Birds to her secret operations sing.

I confess I have no greater reason in addressing this
Essay to your lordship than that it might awaken in
you the desire of writing something, in whatever kind
it be, which might be an honour to our age and country.
20 And methinks it might have the same effect on you
which Homer tells us the sight of the Greeks and
Trojans before the fleet had on the spirit of Achilles;
who, though he had resolved not to engage, yet found
a martial warmth to steal upon him at the sight of
25 blows, the sound of trumpets, and the cries of fighting
men. For my own part, if, in treating of this subject, I
sometimes dissent from the opinion of better wits, I
declare it is not so much to combat their opinions as to
defend mine own, which were first made public. Some-
30 times, like a scholar in a fencing-school, I put forth
myself, and show my own ill play, on purpose to be
better taught. Sometimes I stand desperately to my
arms, like the foot when deserted by their horse, not in
hope to overcome, but only to yield on more honourable
35 terms. And yet, my lord, this war of opinions, you well
know, has fallen out among the writers of all ages, and
sometimes betwixt friends. Only it has been prosecuted

by some, like pedants, with violence of words, and managed by others, like gentlemen, with candour and civility. Even Tully had a controversy with his dear Atticus; and in one of his dialogues makes him sustain the part of an enemy in philosophy, who, in his letters, 5 is his confident of state, and made privy to the most weighty affairs of the Roman senate. And the same respect which was paid by Tully to Atticus, we find returned to him afterwards by Cæsar, on a like occasion, who, answering his book in praise of Cato, made it not 10 so much his business to condemn Cato as to praise Cicero.

But that I may decline some part of the encounter with my adversaries, whom I am neither willing to combat nor well able to resist, I will give your lordship the relation of a dispute betwixt some of our wits on the 15 same subject, in which they did not only speak of plays in verse, but mingled, in the freedom of discourse, some things of the ancient, many of the modern ways of writing; comparing those with these, and the wits of our nation with those of others 'Tis true, they differed in 20 their opinions, as 'tis probable they would. neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them; and that as Tacitus professes of himself, *sine studio partium aut ira*, without passion or interest, leaving your lordship to decide it in favour of which part you shall judge most 25 reasonable, and withal, to pardon the many errors of

Your lordship's

Most obedient humble servant,

JOHN DRYDEN

TO THE READER

THE drift of the ensuing discourse was chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them. This I intimate, lest any should think me so exceeding vain as to teach others an art which they understand much better than myself. But if this incorrect Essay, written in the country without the help of books or advice of friends, shall find any acceptance in the world, I promise to myself a better success of the Second Part, wherein I shall more fully treat of the virtues and faults of the English poets who have written either in this, the epic, or the lyric way.

AN ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESY

It was that memorable day, in the first summer of the late war, when our navy engaged the Dutch; a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed fleets which any age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the globe, the commerce of nations, and the riches of the universe: while these vast floating bodies, on either side, moved against each other in parallel lines, and our countrymen, under the happy conduct of his royal highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the line of the enemies, the noise of the cannon from both navies reached our ears about the city, so that all men being alarmed with it, and in a dreadful suspense of the event which they knew was then deciding, every one went following the sound as his fancy led him, and leaving the town almost empty, some took towards the park, some cross the river, others down it; all seeking the noise in the depth of silence

Amongst the rest, it was the fortune of Eugenius, Crites, Lisideus, and Neander to be in company together; three of them persons whom their wit and quality have made known to all the town, and whom I have chosen to hide under these borrowed names, that they may not suffer by so ill a relation as I am going to make of their discourse.

Taking then a barge which a servant of Lisideus

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had provided for them, they made haste to shoot the bridge, and left behind them that great fall of waters which hindered them from hearing what they desired: after which, having disengaged themselves from many
5 vessels which rode at anchor in the Thames, and almost blocked up the passage towards Greenwich, they ordered the watermen to let fall their oars more gently; and then, every one favouring his own curiosity with a strict silence, it was not long ere they perceived
10 the air to break about them like the noise of distant thunder, or of swallows in a chimney: those little undulations of sound, though almost vanishing before they reached them, yet still seeming to retain somewhat of their first horror which they had betwixt the
15 fleets. After they had attentively listened till such time as the sound by little and little went from them, Eugenius, lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the first who congratulated to the rest that happy omen of our nation's victory: adding, that we had but
20 this to desire in confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that noise which was now leaving the English coast. When the rest had concurred in the same opinion, Crites, a person of a sharp judgment, and somewhat too delicate a taste in wit, which the
25 world have mistaken in him for ill-nature, said, smiling to us, that if the concernment of this battle had not been so exceeding great, he could scarce have wished the victory at the price he knew he must pay for it, in being subject to the reading and hearing of so
30 many ill verses as he was sure would be made on that subject: adding, that no argument could scape some of those eternal rhymers, who watch a battle with more diligence than the ravens and birds of prey; and the worst of them surest to be first in upon the
35 quarry; while the better able, either out of modesty

writ not at all, or set that due value upon their poems, as to let them be often desired and long expected. "There are some of those impertinent people of whom you speak," answered Lisideus, "who, to my knowledge, are already so provided, either way, that they
 5 can produce not only a panegyric upon the victory, but, if need be, a funeral elegy on the duke: wherein, after they have crowned his valour with many laurels, they will at last deplore the odds under which he fell, concluding that his courage deserved a better destiny." 10
 All the company smiled at the conceit of Lisideus; but Crites, more eager than before, began to make particular exceptions against some writers, and said the public magistrate ought to send betimes to forbid
 15 them; and that it concerned the peace and quiet of all honest people, that ill poets should be as well silenced as seditious preachers. "In my opinion," replied Eugenius, "you pursue your point too far; for as to my own particular, I am so great a lover of poesy, that I could wish them all rewarded who attempt
 20 but to do well; at least, I would not have them worse used than one of their brethren was by Sylla the Dictator: *Quem in concione vidimus* (says Tully) *cum ei libellum malus poeta de populo subjecisset, quod epigramma in eum fecisset tantummodo alternis versibus*
 25 *longiusculis, statim ex iis rebus quas tunc vendebat jubere et præmium tribui, sub ea conditione ne quid postea scriberet.*" "I could wish, with all my heart," replied Crites, "that many whom we know were as bountifully thanked upon the same condition, that
 30 they would never trouble us again. For, amongst others, I have a mortal apprehension of two poets, whom this victory, with the help of both her wings, will never be able to escape." "'Tis easy to guess whom you intend," said Lisideus, "and without
 35

naming them, I ask you if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches upon words, and a certain clownish kind of raillery? if now and then he does not offer at a catachresis or Clevelandism, wrestling and torturing a word into another meaning: in fine, if he be not one of those whom the French would call *un mauvais buffon*? one who is so much a well-willer to the satire, that he intends at least to spare no man; and though he cannot strike a blow to hurt any,

10 yet he ought to be punished for the malice of the action; as our witches are justly hanged because they think themselves to be such, and suffer deservedly for believing they did mischief, because they meant it."

"You have described him", said Crites, "so exactly,

15 that I am afraid to come after you with my other extremity of poetry. He is one of those who, having had some advantage of education and converse, knows better than the other what a poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any man. His

20 style and matter are everywhere alike; he is the most calm, peaceable writer you ever read: he never disquiets your passions with the least concernment, but still leaves you in as even a temper as he found you; he is a very leveller in poetry: he creeps along with

25 ten little words in every line, and helps out his numbers with *For to* and *Unto*, and all the pretty expletives he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line, while the sense is left tired half-way behind it: he doubly starves all his verses, first, for

30 want of thought, and then of expression. His poetry neither has wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in Martial,

Pauper videri Cinna vult, et est pauper.

He affects plainness, to cover his want of imagination: when he writes the serious way, the highest

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flight of his fancy is some miserable antithesis or seeming contradiction; and in the comic he is still reaching at some thin conceit, the ghost of a jest, and that too flies before him, never to be caught. These swallows which we see before us on the Thames, are the just resemblance of his wit: you may observe how near the water they stoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how seldom they touch it; and when they do, 'tis but the surface; they skim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the air and leave it." "Well, gentlemen," said Eugenius, "you may speak your pleasure of these authors, but though I and some few more about the town may give you a peaceable hearing, yet assure yourselves there are multitudes who would think you malicious and them injured; especially him whom you first described. He is the very Withers of the city they have bought more editions of his works than would serve to lay under all their pies at the lord mayor's Christmas. When his famous poem first came out in the year 1660, I have seen them reading it in the midst of Change-time, nay, so vehement they were at it, that they lost their bargain by the candles' ends. But what will you say if he has been received amongst great persons? I can assure you, this day he is the envy of one who is lord in the art of quibbling, and who does not take it well that any man should intrude so far into his province." "All I would wish," replied Crites, "is that they who love his writings may still admire him and his fellow poet: *Qui Bavium non odit &c.* is curse sufficient." "And farther," added Lisideus, "I believe there is no man who writes well but would think he had hard measure if their admirers should praise anything of his: *Nam quos contemnimus, eorum quoque laudes contemnimus.*" "There are so few who write well in this

age," said Crites, "that methinks any praises should be welcome; they neither rise to the dignity of the last age, nor to any of the ancients; and we may cry out of the writers of this time, with more reason than
 5 Petronius of his, *Pace vestra liceat dixisse, primi omnium eloquentiam perdidistis*: you have debauched the true old poetry so far, that nature, which is the soul of it, is not in any of your writings."

"If your quarrel," said Eugenius, "to those who now
 10 write, be grounded only on your reverence to antiquity, there is no man more ready to adore those great Greeks and Romans than I am: but, on the other side, I cannot think so contemptibly of the age in which I live, or so dishonourably of my own country, as not to
 15 judge we equal the ancients in most kinds of poesy, and in some surpass them; neither know I any reason why I may not be as zealous for the reputation of our age as we find the ancients themselves were in reference to those who lived before them. For you hear your
 20 Horace saying,

*Indigner quidquam reprehendi, non quia crasse
 Compositum illepidere fuletur, sed quia nuper.*

And after,

*Si meliora dies, ut vina, poemata reddit,
 25 Scire velim pretium chartis quotus arroget annus?*

But I see I am engaging in a wide dispute, where the arguments are not likely to reach close on either side; for poesy is of so large an extent, and so many both of the ancients and moderns have done well in all
 30 kinds of it, that, in citing one against the other, we shall take up more time this evening than each man's occasions will allow him: therefore I would ask Crites to what part of poesy he would confine his arguments,

and whether he would defend the general cause of the ancients against the moderns, or oppose any age of the moderns against this of ours?"

Crites, a little while considering upon this demand, told Eugenius that if he pleased he would limit their dispute to dramatic poesy; in which he thought it not difficult to prove, either that the ancients were superior to the moderns, or the last age to this of ours.

Eugenius was somewhat surprised when he heard Crites make choice of that subject. "For ought I see," said he, "I have undertaken a harder province than I imagined, for though I never judged the plays of the Greek and Roman poets comparable to ours, yet, on the other side, those we now see acted come short of many which were written in the last age: but my comfort is, if we are o'ercome, it will be only by our own countrymen: and if we yield to them in this one part of poesy, we more surpass them in all the other; for in the epic or lyric way, it will be hard for them to show us one such amongst them as we have many now living, or who lately were. They can produce nothing so courtly writ, or which expresses so much the conversation of a gentleman, as Sir John Suckling; nothing so even, sweet, and flowing, as Mr. Waller, nothing so majestic, so correct, as Sir John Denham; nothing so elevated, so copious, and full of spirit, as Mr. Cowley. As for the Italian, French, and Spanish plays, I can make it evident that those who now write surpass them, and that the drama is wholly ours."

All of them were thus far of Eugenius his opinion that the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers, even Crites himself did not much oppose it: and every one was willing to

acknowledge how much our poesy is improved by the happiness of some writers yet living, who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words, to retrench the superfluities of expression, and
5 to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse, that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it.

Eugenius was going to continue this discourse, when Lisideus told him that it was necessary, before they
10 proceeded further, to take a standing measure of their controversy; for how was it possible to be decided who writ the best plays, before we know what a play should be? But, this once agreed on by both parties, each might have recourse to it, either to prove his own ad-
15 vantages, or to discover the failings of his adversary.

He had no sooner said this but all desired the favour of him to give the definition of a play; and they were the more importunate because neither Aristotle, nor Horace, nor any other who had writ of that subject,
20 had ever done it.

Lisideus, after some modest denials, at last confessed he had a rude notion of it; indeed, rather a description than a definition; but which served to guide him in his private thoughts when he was to make a
25 judgment of what others writ: that he conceived a play ought to be, *A just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.*

This definition, though Crites raised a logical objection against it, that it was only *a genere et fine*, and so not altogether perfect, was yet well received by the rest: and, after they had given order to the watermen to turn their barge, and row softly, that they might take
35 the cool of the evening in their return, Crites, being

desired by the company to begin, spoke on behalf of the ancients in this manner:

"If confidence presage a victory, Eugenius, in his own opinion, has already triumphed over the ancients: nothing seems more easy to him than to overcome those whom it is our greatest praise to have imitated well; for we do not only build upon their foundations, but by their models. Dramatic poesy had time enough, reckoning from Thespis (who first invented it) to Aristophanes, to be born, to grow up, and to flourish in maturity. It has been observed of arts and sciences, that in one and the same century they have arrived to great perfection, and no wonder, since every age has a kind of universal genius, which inclines those that live in it to some particular studies: the work then being pushed on by many hands, must of necessity go forward.

"Is it not evident, in these last hundred years (when the study of philosophy has been the business of all the *Virtuosi in Christendom*), that almost a new nature has been revealed to us? that more errors of the school have been detected, more useful experiments in philosophy have been made, more noble secrets in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy, discovered, than in all those credulous and doting ages from Aristotle to us? So true it is that nothing spreads more fast than science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

"Add to this the more than common emulation that was in those times of writing well, which, though it be found in all ages and all persons that pretend to the same reputation, yet poesy, being then in more esteem than now it is, had greater honours decreed to the professors of it, and consequently the rivalry was more high between them: they had judges ordained to decide their merit, and prizes to reward it; and

historians have been diligent to record of Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Lycophron, and the rest of them, both who they were that vanquished in these wars of the theatre, and how often they were crowned; while
6 the Asian kings and Grecian commonwealths scarce afforded them a nobler subject than the unmanly luxuries of a debauched court, or giddy intrigues of a factious city. *Alit æmulatio ingenia* (saith Paterculus) *et nunc invidia, nunc admiratio incitationem accendit*:
10 emulation is the spur of wit; and sometimes envy, sometimes admiration, quickens our endeavours.

"But now since the rewards of honour are taken away, that virtuous emulation is turned into direct malice; yet so slothful, that it contents itself to condemn
15 and cry down others without attempting to do better. 'Tis a reputation too unprofitable to take the necessary pains for it; yet wishing they had it, that desire is incitement enough to hinder others from it. And this, in short, Eugenius, is the reason why you have now
20 so few good poets, and so many severe judges. Certainly, to imitate the ancients well, much labour and long study is required: which pains, I have already shown, our poets would want encouragement to take, if yet they had ability to go through the work. Those
25 ancients have been faithful imitators and wise observers of that nature which is so torn and ill-represented in our plays; they have handed down to us a perfect resemblance of her; which we, like ill copiers, neglecting to look on, have rendered monstrous and disfigured.
30 But, that you may know how much you are indebted to those your masters, and be ashamed to have so ill-requited them, I must remember you that all the rules by which we practise the drama at this day (either such as relate to the justness and symmetry of the plot; or the
35 episodical ornaments, such as descriptions, narrations,

and other beauties, which are not essential to the play), were delivered to us from the observations which Aristotle made of those poets who either lived before him or were his contemporaries: we have added nothing of our own, except we have the confidence to say 5 our wit is better; of which none boast in this our age but such as understand not theirs. Of that book which Aristotle has left us, *περὶ τῆς Ποιητικῆς*, Horace his *Art of Poetry* is an excellent comment, and, I believe, restores to us that second book of his concerning 10 comedy, which is wanting in him.

"Out of these two have been extracted the famous rules which the French call *Des Trois Unités*, or The Three Unities, which ought to be observed in every regular play; namely, of time, place, and action. 15

"The unity of time they comprehend in twenty-four hours, the compass of a natural day, or as near it as can be contrived, and the reason of it is obvious to everyone, that the time of the feigned action or fable of the play should be proportioned as near as can be 20 to the duration of that time in which it is represented: since therefore all plays are acted on the theatre in a space of time much within the compass of twenty-four hours, that play is to be thought the nearest imitation of nature, whose plot or action is confined within that 25 time; and, by the same rule which concludes this general proportion of time, it follows that all the parts of it are (as near as may be) to be equally subdivided;

30

compass of the remaining half, for it is unnatural that one act, which being spoke or written is not longer than the rest, should be supposed longer by the audience: 'tis therefore the poet's duty to take care that

no act should be imagined to exceed the time in which it is represented on the stage, and that the intervals and inequalities of time be supposed to fall out between the acts.

- 6 "This rule of time, how well it has been observed by the ancients, most of their plays will witness; you see them in their tragedies (wherein to follow this rule is certainly most difficult), from the very beginning of their plays, falling close into that part of the story
10 which they intend for the action or principal object of it, leaving the former part to be delivered by narration: so that they set the audience, as it were, at the post where the race is to be concluded: and, saving them the tedious expectation of seeing the poet set out and
15 ride the beginning of the course, they suffer you not to behold him till he is in sight of the goal, and just upon you.

- "For the second unity, which is that of place, the ancients meant by it that the scene ought to be continued through the play in the same place where it
20 was laid in the beginning: for the stage, on which it is represented, being but one and the same place, it is unnatural to conceive it many, and those far distant from one another. I will not deny but by the varia-
25 tion of painted scenes the fancy (which in these cases will contribute to its own deceit) may sometimes imagine it several places, upon some appearance of probability; yet it still carries the greater likelihood of truth, if those places be supposed so near each other,
30 as in the same town or city, which may all be comprehended under the larger denomination of one place: for a greater distance will bear no proportion to the shortness of time which is allotted, in the acting, to pass from one of them to another. For the observation of
35 this, next to the ancients, the French are most to be

commended. They tie themselves so strictly to the unity of place that you never see in any of their plays a scene changed in the middle of an act: if the act begins in a garden, a street, or chamber, 'tis ended in the same place; and that you may know it to be the same, the stage is so supplied with persons that it is never empty all the time: he who enters second has business with him who was on before; and before the second quits the stage, a third appears who has business with him.

"This Corneille calls *la liaison des scènes*, the continuity or joining of the scenes, and 'tis a good mark of a well-contrived play, when all the persons are known to each other, and every one of them has some affairs with all the rest.

"As for the third unity, which is that of action, the ancients meant no other by it than what the logicians do by their *finis*, the end or scope of any action: that which is the first in intention and last in execution. Now the poet is to aim at one great and complete action, to the carrying on of which all things in the play, even the very obstacles, are to be subservient, and the reason of this is as evident as any of the former.

"For two actions, equally laboured and driven on by the writer, would destroy the unity of the poem; it would be no longer one play, but two not but that there may be many actions in a play, as Ben Johnson has observed in his *Discoteries*, but they must be all subservient to the great one, which our language happily expresses in the name of under-plots: such as in Terence's *Eunuch* is the difference and reconciliation of Thais and Phædrus, which is not the chief business of the play, but promotes the marriage of Chærea and Chremes's sister, principally intended by the poet.

There ought to be but one action, says Corneille, that is one complete action, which leaves the mind of the audience in a full repose; but this cannot be brought to pass but by many other imperfect actions which
6 conduce to it, and hold the audience in a delightful suspense of what will be.

"If by these rules (to omit many others drawn from the precepts and practice of the ancients) we should judge our modern plays, 'tis probable that few of them
10 would endure the trial: that which should be the business of a day, takes up in some of them an age; instead of one action, they are the epitome of a man's life; and for one spot of ground (which the stage should represent) we are sometimes in more countries
15 than the map can show us.

"But if we will allow the ancients to have contrived well, we must acknowledge them to have written better. Questionless we are deprived of a great stock of wit in the loss of Menander amongst the Greek
20 poets, and of Cæcilius, Afranius, and Varius among the Romans: we may guess at Menander's excellency by the plays of Terence, who translated some of them, and yet wanted so much of him that he was called by C. Cæsar the half-Menander; and may judge of Varius
25 by the testimonies of Horace, Martial, and Velleius Paterculus. 'Tis probable that these, could they be recovered, would decide the controversy; but so long as Aristophanes and Plautus are extant, while the tragedies of Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca are in
30 our hands, I can never see one of those plays which are now written but it increases my admiration of the ancients; and yet I must acknowledge further that, to admire them as we ought, we should understand them better than we do. Doubtless many things appear flat
35 to us, the wit of which depended on some custom or

story which never came to our knowledge, or perhaps on some criticism in their language, which being so long dead, and only remaining in their books, 'tis not possible they should make us understand perfectly To read Macrobius explaining the propriety and elegancy of many words in Virgil, which I had before passed over without consideration as common things, is enough to assure me that I ought to think the same of Terence; and that in the purity of his style (which Tully so much valued that he ever carried his works about him) there is yet left in him great room for admiration, if I knew but where to place it. In the mean time I must desire you to take notice that the greatest man of the last age, Ben Johnson, was willing to give place to them in all things. he was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiarist of all the others, you track him everywhere in their snow: if Horace, Lucan, Petronius Arbiter, Seneca, and Juvenal had their own from him, there are few serious thoughts which are new in him you will pardon me, therefore, if I presume he loved their fashion when he wore their clothes. But since I have otherwise a great veneration for him, and you, Eugenius, prefer him above all other poets, I will use no farther argument to you than his example I will produce before you Father Ben, dressed in all the ornaments and colours of the ancients, you will need no other guide to our party if you follow him, and whether you consider the bad plays of our age, or regard the good plays of the last, both the best and worst of the modern poets will equally instruct you to admire the ancients."

CRITES had no sooner left speaking but Eugenius, who had waited with some impatience for it, thus began.

"I have observed in your speech that the former part of it is convincing as to what the moderns have

profited by the rules of the ancients; but in the latter you are careful to conceal how much they have excelled them. We own all the helps we have from them, and want neither veneration nor gratitude while
5 we acknowledge that, to overcome them, we must make use of all the advantages we have received from them: but to these assistances we have joined our own industry; for, had we sat down with a dull imitation of them, we might then have lost somewhat of the old
10 perfection, but never acquired any that was new. We draw not therefore after their lines, but those of nature; and having the life before us, besides the experience of all they knew, it is no wonder if we hit some airs and features which they have missed. I deny not what you
15 urge of arts and sciences, that they have flourished in some ages more than others; but your instance in philosophy makes for me: for if natural causes be more known now than in the time of Aristotle, because more studied, it follows that poesy and other arts may, with the
20 same pains, arrive still nearer to perfection; and, that granted, it will rest for you to prove that they wrought more perfect images of human life than we; which seeing in your discourse you have avoided to make good, it shall now be my task to show you some of their defects, and some few excellencies of the moderns. And
25 I think there is none among us can imagine I do it enviously, or with purpose to detract from them; for what interest of fame or profit can the living lose by the reputation of the dead? On the other side, it is a
30 great truth which Velleius Paterculus affirms, *Audita visis libentius laudamus; et presentia invidia, præterita admiratione prosequimur; et his nos obrui, illis instrui credimus*: that praise or censure is certainly the most sincere which unbribed posterity shall give us.
35 "Be pleased then, in the first place, to take notice

that the Greek poesy, which Crites has affirmed to have arrived to perfection in the reign of the old comedy, was so far from it, that the distinction of it into acts was not known to them; or if it were, it is yet so darkly delivered to us that we cannot make it out. 5

"All we know of it is from the singing of their chorus; and that too is so uncertain that in some of their plays we have reason to conjecture they sang more than five times. Aristotle indeed divides the integral parts of a play into four. First, the *Protasis*, or entrance, which gives light only to the characters of the persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the action: Secondly, the *Epitasis*, or working up of the plot, where the play grows warmer, the design or action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass. Thirdly, the *Catastasis*, called by the Romans *Status*, the height and full growth of the play. we may call it properly the counter-turn, which destroys that expectation, embroils the action in new difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you; as you may have observed in a violent stream resisted by a narrow passage, it runs round to an eddy, and carries back the waters with more swiftness than it brought them on. Lastly, the *Catastrophe*, which the Grecians called *λύσις*, the French *le dénouement*, and we the discovery or unravelling of the plot there you see all things settling again upon their first foundations, and, the obstacles which hindered the design or action of the play once removed, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it. Thus this great man delivered to us the image of a play, and I must confess it is so lively, that from thence much light has been derived to the forming it more perfectly into acts and scenes: 10 15 20 25 30

but what poet first limited to five the number of the acts, I know not; only we see it so firmly established in the time of Horace, that he gives it for a rule in comedy, *Neu brevior quinto, neu sit productior actu.*

5 So that you see the Grecians cannot be said to have consummated this art; writing rather by entrances than by acts, and having rather a general indigested notion of a play, than knowing how and where to bestow the particular graces of it.

10 "But since the Spaniards at this day allow but three acts, which they call *Jornadas*, to a play, and the Italians in many of theirs follow them, when I condemn the ancients, I declare it is not altogether because they have not five acts to every play, but
15 because they have not confined themselves to one certain number: 'tis building a house without a model; and when they succeeded in such undertakings, they ought to have sacrificed to Fortune, not to the Muses.

"Next, for the plot, which Aristotle called τὸ μῦθος,
20 and often τῶν πραγμάτων σύνθεσις, and from him the Romans *Fabula*, it has already been judiciously observed by a late writer that in their tragedies it was only some tale derived from Thebes or Troy, or at least something that happened in those two ages,
25 which was worn so threadbare by the pens of all the epic poets, and even by tradition itself of the talkative Greeklings (as Ben Johnson calls them), that before it came upon the stage, it was already known to all the audience: and the people, so soon as ever they heard
30 the name of *Œdipus*, knew as well as the poet that he had killed his father by a mistake, and committed incest with his mother, before the play; that they were now to hear of a great plague, an oracle, and the ghost of *Laius*: so that they sat with a yawning kind
35 of expectation till he was to come with his eyes pulled

out, and speak a hundred or more verses in a tragic tone in complaint of his misfortunes. But one *Œdipus*, *Hercules*, or *Medea* had been tolerable: poor people, they scaped not so good cheap; they had still the *chapon bouillé* set before them, till their appetites were cloyed with the same dish, and, the novelty being gone, the pleasure vanished. so that one main end of dramatic poesy in its definition, which was to cause delight, was of consequence destroyed.

"In their comedies, the Romans generally borrowed their plots from the Greek poets; and theirs were commonly a little girl stolen or wandered from her parents, brought back unknown to the city, there got with child by some lewd young fellow; who, by the help of his servant, cheats his father; and when her time comes to cry *Juno Lucina fer opem*, one or other sees a little box or cabinet which was carried away with her, and so discovers her to her friends, if some god do not prevent it, by coming down in a machine and taking the thanks of it to himself.

"By the plot you may guess much of the characters of the persons. An old father who would willingly before he dies see his son well married, his debauched son, kind in his nature to his mistress, but miserably in want of money; a servant or slave, who has so much wit to strike in with him, and help to dupe his father; a braggadochio captain, a parasite, and a lady of pleasure.

"As for the poor honest maid, on whom the story is built, and who ought to be one of the principal actors in the play, she is commonly a mute in it: she has the breeding of the old Elizabeth way, which was for maids to be seen and not to be heard, and it is enough you know she is willing to be married when the fifth act requires it.

"These are plots built after the Italian mode of houses, you see through them all at once; the characters are indeed the imitations of nature, but so narrow as if they had imitated only an eye or an hand, and
8 did not dare to venture on the lines of a face or the proportion of a body.

"But in how strait a compass soever they have bounded their plots and characters, we will pass it by if they have regularly pursued them, and perfectly
10 observed those three unities of time, place, and action; the knowledge of which, you say, is derived to us from them. But in the first place give me leave to tell you that the unity of place, however it might be practised by them, was never any of their rules. We
15 neither find it in Aristotle, Horace, or any who have written of it, till in our age the French poets first made it a precept of the stage. The unity of time, even Terence himself, who was the best and most regular of them, has neglected: his *Heautontimorumenos*, or
20 Self-punisher, takes up visibly two days; says Scaliger, the two first acts concluding the first day, the three last the day ensuing: and Euripides, in tying himself to one day, has committed an absurdity never to be forgiven him; for in one of his tragedies he has
25 made Theseus go from Athens to Thebes, which was about forty English miles, under the walls of it to give battle, and appear victorious in the next act; and yet from the time of his departure to the return of the Nuntius, who gives the relation of his victory, *Æthra*
30 and the Chorus have but thirty-six verses; which is not for every mile a verse.

"The like error is as evident in Terence his *Eunuch*, when Laches, the old man, enters by mistake into the house of Thais, where betwixt his exit and
35 the entrance of Pythias, who comes to give an ample

relation of the disorders he has raised within, Parmeno, who was left upon the stage, has not above five lines to speak. *C'est bien employer un temps si court*, says the French poet who furnished me with one of the observations, and almost all their tragedies will afford us 5 examples of the like nature.

"Tis true, they have kept the continuity, or, as you called it, *liaison des scènes*, somewhat better: two do not perpetually come in together, talk, and go out together; and other two succeed them, and do the 10 same throughout the act, which the English call by the name of single scenes; but the reason is because they have seldom above two or three scenes, properly so called, in every act, for it is to be accounted a new scene, not only every time the stage is 15 empty, but every person who enters, though to others, makes it so, because he introduces a new business. Now the plots of their plays being narrow, and the persons few, one of their acts was written in a less compass than one of our well-wrought scenes; and 20 yet they are often deficient even in this. To go no further than Terence, you find in the *Eunuch* Antipho entering single in the midst of the third act, after Chremes and Pythias were gone off. in the same play you have likewise Dorcas beginning the fourth 25 act alone, and after she has made a relation of what was done at the so'dier's entertainment (which by the way was very inartificial, because she was presumed to speak directly to the audience, and to acquaint them with what was necessary to be known, but yet 30 should have been so contrived by the poet as to have been told by persons of the drama to one another, and so by them to have come to the knowledge of the people), she quits the stage, and Phædrus enters next, alone likewise. he also gives you an account: 35

of himself, and of his returning from the country, in monologue; to which unnatural way of narration Terence is subject in all his plays. In his *Adelphi*, or Brothers, Syrus and Demea enter after the scene
5 was broken by the departure of Sostrata, Geta, and Canthara: and indeed you can scarce look into any of his comedies where you will not presently discover the same interruption.

“But as they have failed both in laying of their plots,
10 and in the management, swerving from the rules of their own art by misrepresenting nature to us, in which they have ill satisfied one intention of a play, which was delight, so in the instructive part they have erred worse: instead of punishing vice and rewarding virtue,
15 they have often shown a prosperous wickedness and an unhappy piety: they have set before us a bloody image of revenge in Medea, and given her dragons to convey her safe from punishment; a Priam and Astyanax murdered, and Cassandra ravished, and the
20 lust and murder ending in the victory of him who acted them: in short, there is no indecorum in any of our modern plays, which, if I would excuse, I could not shadow with some authority from the ancients.

“And one farther note of them let me leave you:
25 tragedies and comedies were not writ then as they are now, promiscuously, by the same person; but he who found his genius bending to the one, never attempted the other way. This is so plain that I need not instance to you that Aristophanes, Plautus, Ter-
30 ence, never any of them writ a tragedy; Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca never meddled with comedy: the sock and buskin were not worn by the same poet. Having then so much care to excel in one kind, very little is to be pardoned them if they
35 miscarried in it. And this would lead me to the

consideration of their wit, had not Crites given me sufficient warning not to be too bold in my judgment of it; because the languages being dead, and many of the customs and little accidents on which it depended lost to us, we are not competent judges of it. But though I grant that here and there we may miss the application of a proverb or a custom, yet a thing well said will be wit in all languages; and though it may lose something in the translation, yet to him who reads it in the original, 'tis still the same; he has an idea of its excellency, though it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words than those in which he finds it. When Phædria in the *Eunuch* had a command from his mistress to be absent two days, and encouraging himself to go through with it, said, *Tandem ego non illa caream, si opus sit, vel totum triduum!* Parmeno, to mock the softness of his master, lifting up his hands and eyes, cries out, as it were in admiration, *Hui! universum triduum!* the elegance of which *universum*, though it cannot be rendered in our language, yet leaves an impression on our souls: but this happens seldom in him, in Plautus oftener, who is infinitely too bold in his metaphors and coining words; out of which many times his wit is nothing; which questionless was one reason why Horace falls upon him so severely in those verses:

*Sed proci nostri Plantinos et numeros et
Laudare sales, nimium patienter utrumque,
Ne dicam stulte*

For Horace himself was cautious to obtrude a new word on his readers, and makes custom and common use the best measure of receiving it into our writings.

*Multa renascentur qua nunc cecidere cadentque
Qua nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
Quem paces arbitrium est, et jus, et norma loquendi.*

"The not observing this rule is that which the world has blamed in our satirist Cleveland; to express a thing hard and unnaturally is his new way of elocution. 'Tis true, no poet but may sometimes use a
5 catachresis: Virgil does it,

Mistaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho,

in his eclogue of Pollio, and in his seventh *Æneid*,

Mirantur et undat,

Miratur nemus, insuetum fulgentia longe

10 *Scula virum fluvio, pictasque innare carinas.*

And Ovid once so modestly that he asks leave to do it,

Si verbo audacia detur,

Haud metuum summi dixisse Palatia cæli,

15 calling the court of Jupiter by the name of Augustus his palace; though in another place he is more bold, where he says, *Et longas visent Capitolia pompas*. But to do this always, and never be able to write a line without it, though it may be admired by some
20 few pedants, will not pass upon those who know that wit is best conveyed to us in the most easy language; and is most to be admired when a great thought comes dressed in words so commonly received that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions, as the
25 best meat is the most easily digested. But we cannot read a verse of Cleveland's without making a face at it, as if every word were a pill to swallow; he gives us many times a hard nut to break our teeth, without a kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference
30 betwixt his *Satires* and Doctor Donne's, that the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abtruse words: 'tis true, in some places his wit

is independent of his words, as in that of the rebel Scot:

Had Cain been Scot, God would have changed his doom;
Not forced him wander, but confined him home.

Si sic, omnia dixisset! This is wit in all languages: 5
'tis like Mercury, never to be lost or killed: and so that other,

For beauty, like white powder, makes no noise,
And yet the silent hypocrite destroys.

You see the last line is highly metaphorical, but it 10
is so soft and gentle that it does not shock us as we read it.

"But to return from whence I have digressed, to the consideration of the ancients' writing and their wit, of which by this time you will grant us in some measure 15
to be fit judges. Though I see many excellent thoughts in Seneca, yet he of them who had a genius most proper for the stage, was Ovid, he had a way of writing so fit to stir up a pleasing admiration and concernment, which are the objects of a tragedy, 20
and to show the various movements of a soul combating betwixt different passions, that, had he lived in our age, or in his own could have writ with our advantages, no man but must have yielded to him, and therefore I am confident the *Medea* is none of his, 25
for though I esteem it for the gravity and sententiousness of it, which he himself concludes to be suitable to a tragedy, *Omne genus scripti gravitate tragedia rinat*, yet it moves not my soul enough to judge that he, who in the epic way wrote things so near the 30
drama, as the story of Myrrha, of Caunus and Biblis, and the rest, should stir up no more concernment where he most endeavoured it. The masterpiece of Seneca I hold to be that scene in the *Troades*

where Ulysses is seeking for Astyanax to kill him: there you see the tenderness of a mother so represented in Andromache, that it raises compassion to a high degree in the reader, and bears the nearest resemblance of anything in the tragedies of the ancients to the excellent scenes of passion in Shakespeare or in Fletcher: for love-scenes you will find but few among them; their tragic poets dealt not with that soft passion, but with lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition, and those bloody actions they produced, which were more capable of raising horror than compassion in an audience; leaving love untouched, whose gentleness would have tempered them, which is the most frequent of all the passions, and which, being the private concernment of every person, is soothed by viewing its own image in a public entertainment.

“Among their comedies, we find a scene or two of tenderness, and that where you would least expect it, in Plautus; but to speak generally, their lovers say little, when they see each other, but *anima mea, vita mea*; ζῶν καὶ ψυχῇ, as the women in Juvenal’s time used to cry out in the fury of their kindness. Any sudden gust of passion (as an ecstasy of love in an unexpected meeting) cannot better be expressed than in a word and a sigh, breaking one another. Nature is dumb on such occasions, and to make her speak would be to represent her unlike herself. But there are a thousand other concernments of lovers, as jealousies, complaints, contrivances, and the like, where not to open their minds at large to each other, were to be wanting to their own love, and to the expectation of the audience; who watch the movements of their minds as much as the changes of their fortunes. For the imaging of the first is properly the work of a poet; the latter he borrows from the historian.”

Eugenius was proceeding in that part of his discourse when Crites interrupted him. "I see," said he, "Eugenius and I are never likely to have this question decided betwixt us; for he maintains the moderns have acquired a new perfection in writing; I can only grant they have altered the mode of it. Homer describes his heroes men of great appetites, lovers of beef broiled upon the coals, and good fellows, contrary to the practice of the French romances, whose heroes neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep for love. Virgil makes Æneas a bold avower of his own virtues,

Sum pius Æneas, fama super aethera notus;

which, in the civility of our poets, is the character of a fanfaron or Hector: for with us the knight takes occasion to walk out, or sleep, to avoid the vanity of telling his own story, which the trusty squire is ever to perform for him. So in their love scenes, of which Eugenius spoke last, the ancients were more hearty, we more talkative: they writ love as it was then the mode to make it, and I will grant thus much to Eugenius, that perhaps one of their poets, had he lived in our age,

Si foret hoc nostrum fato delapsus in ævum

(as Horace says of Lucilius), he had altered many things; not that they were not natural before, but that he might accommodate himself to the age in which he lived. Yet in the meantime we are not to conclude anything rashly against those great men, but preserve to them the dignity of masters, and give that honour to their memories (*quos Libitina sacravit*), part of which we expect may be paid to us in future times."

This moderation of Crites, as it was pleasing to all

the company, so it put an end to that dispute; which Eugenius, who seemed to have the better of the argument, would urge no further: but Lisidecius, after he had acknowledged himself of Eugenius his
5 opinion concerning the ancients, yet told him he had forborne till his discourse were ended, to ask him why he preferred the English plays above those of other nations? and whether we ought not to submit our stage to the exactness of our next neighbours?"

10 "Though", said Eugenius, "I am at all times ready to defend the honour of my country against the French, and to maintain we are as well able to vanquish them with our pens as our ancestors have been with their swords, yet, if you please," added he,
15 looking upon Neander, "I will commit this cause to my friend's management; his opinion of our plays is the same with mine: and besides, there is no reason that Crites and I, who have now left the stage, should re-enter so suddenly upon it; which is against the laws
20 of comedy."

"If the question had been stated," replied Lisidecius, "who had writ best, the French or English, forty years ago, I should have been of your opinion, and adjudged the honour to our own nation; but since that time",
25 said he, turning towards Neander, "we have been so long together bad Englishmen, that we had not leisure to be good poets. Beaumont, Fletcher, and Johnson (who were only capable of bringing us to that degree of perfection which we have) were just
30 then leaving the world; as if in an age of so much horror, wit and those milder studies of humanity had no farther business among us. But the Muses, who ever follow peace, went to plant in another country: it was then that the great Cardinal of Richelieu began
35 to take them into his protection, and that, by his

encouragement, Corneille and some other Frenchmen reformed their theatre which before was as much below ours as it now surpasses it and the rest of Europe. But because Crites, in his discourse for the ancients, has prevented me, by observing many rules of the stage which the moderns have borrowed from them, I shall only, in short, demand of you whether you are not convinced that of all nations the French have best observed them? In the unity of time you find them so scrupulous that it yet remains a dispute among their poets whether the artificial day of twelve hours, more or less, be not meant by Aristotle, rather than the natural one of twenty-four; and consequently, whether all plays ought not to be reduced into that compass? This I can testify, that in all their dramas writ within these last twenty years and upwards, I have not observed any that have extended the time to thirty hours. In the unity of place they are full as scrupulous, for many of their critics limit it to that spot of ground where the play is supposed to begin; none of them exceed the compass of the same town or city.

“The unity of action in all their plays is yet more conspicuous, for they do not burden them with underplots, as the English do which is the reason why many scenes of our tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main plot, and that we see two distinct webs in a play, like those in ill-wrought stuffs; and two actions, that is two plays, carried on together, to the confounding of the audience; who, before they are warm in their concernments for one part, are diverted to another, and by that means espouse the interest of neither. From hence likewise it arises that one half of our actors are not known to the other. They keep their distances as if they were Montagues

and Capulets, and seldom begin an acquaintance till the last scene of the fifth act, when they are all to meet upon the stage. There is no theatre in the world has anything so absurd as the English tragi-comedy; 'tis
 5 a drama of our own invention, and the fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so; here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion, and a third of honour and a duel: thus in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of Bedlam. The French afford
 10 you as much variety on the same day, but they do it not so unseasonably, or *mal à propos*, as we. Our poets present you the play and the farce together; and our stages still retain somewhat of the original civility of the Red Bull:

15 *Atque ursum et pugiles media inter carmina poscunt.*

"The end of tragedies or serious plays, says Aristotle, is to beget admiration, compassion, or concernment; but are not mirth and compassion things incompatible? and is it not evident that the poet must
 20 of necessity destroy the former by intermingling the latter? that is, he must ruin the sole end and object of his tragedy to introduce somewhat that is forced into it, and is not of the body of it. Would you not think that physician mad who, having prescribed a
 25 purge, should immediately order you to take restraints?

"But to leave our plays and return to theirs, I have noted one great advantage they have had in the plotting of their tragedies; that is, they are always grounded
 30 upon some known history; according to that of Horace, *Ex noto fictum carmen sequar*; and in that they have so imitated the ancients that they have surpassed them. For the ancients, as was observed before, took for the foundation of their plays some poetical fiction, such

as under that consideration could move but little concernment in the audience, because they already knew the event of it. But the French goes farther:

*Alque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remisscet,
Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet inum*

5

He so interweaves truth with probable fiction that he puts a pleasing fallacy upon us; mends the intrigues of fate, and dispenses with the severity of history, to reward that virtue which has been rendered to us there unfortunate. Sometimes the story has left the success 10 so doubtful that the writer is free, by the privilege of a poet, to take that which of two or more relations will best suit his design: as, for example, in the death of Cyrus, whom Justin and some others report to have perished in the Scythian war, but Xenophon affirms to 15 have died in his bed of extreme old age. Nay more, when the event is past dispute, even then we are willing to be deceived, and the poet, if he contrives it with appearance of truth, has all the audience of his party, at least during the time his play is acting 20 so naturally we are kind to virtue, when our own interest is not in question, that we take it up as the general concernment of mankind. On the other side, if you consider the historical plays of Shakespeare, they are rather so many chronicles of kings, or the business 25 many times of thirty or forty years cramped into a representation of two hours and a half, which is not to imitate or paint nature, but rather to draw her in miniature, to take her in little; to look upon her through the wrong end of a perspective, and receive her images not only much less, but infinitely more imperfect than the life. this, instead of making a pla
delightful, renders it ridiculous.

Quodcumque ostendit mihi sic, incredulus odi.

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15 *Atque ursum et pugiles media inter carmina foscunt.*

"The end of tragedies or serious plays, says Aristotle, is to beget admiration, compassion, or concernment; but are not mirth and compassion things incompatible? and is it not evident that the poet must
 20 of necessity destroy the former by intermingling the latter? that is, he must ruin the sole end and object of his tragedy to introduce somewhat that is forced into it, and is not of the body of it. Would you not think that physician mad who, having prescribed a
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For the spirit of man cannot be satisfied but with truth, or at least verisimilitude; and a poem is to contain, if not τὰ ἔργα, yet ἐρέμειαν ὁμοίαν, as one of the Greek poets has expressed it.

5 "Another thing in which the French differ from us and from the Spaniards, is that they do not embarrass or cumber themselves with too much plot; they only represent so much of a story as will constitute one whole and great action sufficient for a play: we, who
10 undertake more, do but multiply adventures, which, not being produced from one another as effects from causes, but barely following, constitute many actions in the drama, and consequently make it many plays.

"But by pursuing closely one argument which is not
15 cloyed with many turns, the French have gained more liberty for verse, in which they write: they have leisure to dwell upon a subject which deserves it, and to represent the passions (which we have acknowledged to be the poet's work) without being hurried from one
20 thing to another, as we are in the plays of Calderon, which we have seen lately upon our theatres, under the name of Spanish plots. I have taken notice but of one tragedy of ours whose plot has that uniformity and unity of design in it which I have commended in
25 the French; and that is *Rollo*, or rather, under the name of *Rollo*, the story of Bassanius and Geta in Herodian; there indeed the plot is neither large nor intricate, but just enough to fill the minds of the audience, not to cloy them. Besides, you see it
30 founded upon the truth of history, only the time of the action is not reducible to the strictness of the rules; and you see in some places a little farce mingled, which is below the dignity of the other parts; and in this all our poets are extremely peccant: even Ben
35 Johnson himself, in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, has given

which requires this sort of narrations; in the ill management of them, there may.

“But I find I have been too long in this discourse, since the French have many other excellencies not
5 common to us; as that you never see any of their plays end with a conversion, or simple change of will, which is the ordinary way which our poets use to end theirs. It shows little art in the conclusion of a dramatic poem, when they who have hindered the felicity
10 during the four acts, desist from it in the fifth, without some powerful cause to take them off their design: and though I deny not but such reasons may be found, yet it is a path that is cautiously to be trod, and the poet is to be sure he convinces the audience that the motive
15 is strong enough. As for example, the conversion of the usurer in the *Scornful Lady* seems to me a little forced; for, being an usurer, which implies a lover of money to the highest degree of covetousness (and such the poet has represented him), the account he gives
20 for the sudden change is that he has been duped by the wild young fellow; which in reason might render him more wary another time, and make him punish himself with harder fare and coarser clothes, to get up again what he had lost; but that he should look on
25 it as a judgment, and so repent, we may expect to hear in a sermon, but I should never endure it in a play.

“I pass by this; neither will I insist upon the care they take that no person, after his first entrance, shall
30 ever appear, but the business which brings him upon the stage shall be evident; which rule, if observed, must needs render all the events of the play more natural; for there you see the probability of every accident, in the cause that produced it; and that which appears
35 chance in the play will seem so reasonable to you,

that you will there find it almost necessary: so that in the exit of the actor you have a clear account of his purpose and design in the next entrance; though, if the scene be well wrought, the event will commonly deceive you, for there is nothing so absurd, says ⁸ *Cornelle*, as for an actor to leave the stage only because he has no more to say.

"I should now speak of the beauty of their rhyme, and the just reason I have to prefer that way of writing in tragedies before ours in blank verse; but ¹⁰ because it is partly received by us, and therefore not altogether peculiar to them, I will say no more of it in relation to their plays. For our own, I doubt not but it will exceedingly beautify them; and I can see but one reason why it should not generally obtain, that is, ¹⁵ because our poets write so ill in it. This indeed may prove a more prevailing argument than all others which are used to destroy it, and therefore I am only troubled when great and judicious poets, and those who are acknowledged such, have writ or spoke ²⁰ against it; as for others, they are to be answered by that one sentence of an ancient author: *Sed ut primo ad consequendos eos quos priores ducimus accendimur, ita ubi aut præteriri aut æquari eos posse desperatimus studium cum spe senescit quod, scilicet, assequi non potest, sequi desinit; . . . præteritoque eo in quo erinere non possumus, aliquid in quo nitamur conquirimus*"

Lisideus concluded in this manner; and *Neander* after a little pause thus answered him

"I shall grant *Lisideus*, without much dispute, ²⁵ a great part of what he has urged against us. for I acknowledge that the French contrive their plots more regularly, and observe the laws of comedy and decorum of the stage (to speak generally) with more exactness than the English. Farther, I deny not but ~~be~~ ³⁰

taxed us justly in some irregularities of ours which he has mentioned; yet, after all, I am of opinion that neither our faults nor their virtues are considerable enough to place them above us.

- 5 "For the lively imitation of nature being the definition of a play, those which best fulfil that law ought to be esteemed superior to the others. 'Tis true those beauties of the French poesy are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to
 10 give it where it is not: they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man, because not animated with the soul of poesy, which is imitation of humour and passions: and this Lisideius himself, or any other, however biassed to their party, cannot but acknowledge,
 15 if he will either compare the humours of our comedies, or the characters of our serious plays, with theirs. He who will look upon theirs which have been written till these last ten years, or thereabouts, will find it an hard matter to pick out two or three passable humours
 20 amongst them. Corneille himself, their arch poet, what has he produced except the *Liar*, and you know how it was cried up in France; but when it came upon the English stage, though well translated, and that part of Dorant acted to so much advantage as I
 25 am confident it never received in its own country, the most favourable to it would not put it in competition with many of Fletcher's or Ben Johnson's. In the rest of Corneille's comedies you have little humour; he tells you himself his way is, first to show two
 30 lovers in good intelligence with each other, in the working up of the play to embroil them by some mistake, and in the latter end to clear it and reconcile them.

"But of late years Molière, the younger Corneille,
 35 Quinault, and some others, have been imitating afar

off the quick turns and graces of the English stage. They have mixed their serious plays with mirth, like our tragi-comedies, since the death of Cardinal Richelieu; which Lisideius and many others not observing, have commended that in them for a virtue which they themselves no longer practise. Most of their new plays are, like some of ours, derived from the Spanish novels. There is scarce one of them without a veil, and a trusty Diego, who drolls much after the rate of the *Adventures*. But their humours, if I may grace them with that name, are so thin sown that never above one of them comes up in any play. I dare take upon me to find more variety of them in some one play of Ben Johnson's than in all theirs together; as he who has seen the *Alchemist*, the *Silent Woman*, or *Bartholomew Fair*, cannot but acknowledge with me.

"I grant the French have performed what was possible on the ground-work of the Spanish plays; what was pleasant before, they have made regular; but there is not above one good play to be writ on all those plots; they are too much alike to please often, which we need not the experience of our own stage to justify. As for their new way of mingling mirth with serious plot, I do not, with Lisideius, condemn the thing, though I cannot approve their manner of doing it. He tells us we cannot so speedily recollect ourselves after a scene of great passion and concernment as to pass to another of mirth and humour, and to enjoy it with any relish. but why should he imagine the soul of man more heavy than his senses? Does not the eye pass from an unpleasant colour to a pleasant in a much shorter time than is required in this? and does not the unpleasantness of the first commend the beauty of the latter? The *art* of a

logic might have convinced him that contraries, when placed near, set off each other. A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes, as we bait in a journey that we may go
5 on with greater ease. A scene of mirth mixed with tragedy has the same effect upon us which our music has betwixt the acts; which we find a relief to us from the best plots and language of the stage, if the discourses have been long. I must therefore have
10 stronger arguments ere I am convinced that compassion and mirth in the same subject destroy each other; and in the meantime cannot but conclude, to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the
15 stage than was ever known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragi-comedy.

“And this leads me to wonder why Lisideius and many others should cry up the barrenness of the French plots above the variety and copiousness of the
20 English. Their plots are single; they carry on one design, which is pushed forward by all the actors, every scene in the play contributing and moving towards it. Our plays, besides the main design, have under-plots or by-concernments of less considerable persons and
25 intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main plot: as they say the orb of the fixed stars, and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the motion of the *primum mobile*, in which they are contained. That
30 similitude expresses much of the English stage; for if contrary motions may be found in nature to agree, if a planet can go east and west at the same time, one way by virtue of his own motion, the other by the force of the first mover, it will not be difficult to
35 imagine how the under-plot, which is only different,

not contrary to the great design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

"Eugenius has already shown us, from the confession of the French poets, that the unity of action is sufficiently preserved if all the imperfect actions of the play are conducing to the main design; but when those petty intrigues of a play are so ill ordered that they have no coherence with the other, I must grant that Lisideus has reason to tax that want of due connexion; for co-ordination in a play is as dangerous and unnatural as in a state. In the meantime he must acknowledge our variety, if well ordered, will afford a greater pleasure to the audience.

"As for his other argument, that by pursuing one single theme they gain an advantage to express and work up the passions, I wish any example he could bring from them would make it good, for I confess their verses are to me the coldest I have ever read. Neither indeed is it possible for them, in the way they take, so to express passion as that the effects it should appear in the concernment of an audience, their speeches being so many declamations, which tire us with the length, so that instead of persuading us to grieve for their imaginary heroes, we are concerned for our own trouble, as we are in tedious visits of bad company; we are in pain till they are gone. When the French stage came to be reformed by Cardinal Richelieu, those long harangues were introduced to comply with the gravity of a churchman. Look upon the *Cinna* and *Pompey*; they are not so properly to be called plays as long discourses of reason of state and *Polieucte* in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs. Since that time it is grown into a custom, and their actors speak by the hour-glass, like our parsons; nay, they account it the grace

of their parts, and think themselves disparaged by the poet if they may not twice or thrice in a play entertain the audience with a speech of an hundred lines. I deny not but this may suit well enough
5 with the French; for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious: and this I conceive to be one reason why comedies are more pleasing to
10 us, and tragedies to them. But to speak generally, it cannot be denied that short speeches and replies are more apt to move the passions and beget concernment in us than the other; for it is unnatural for any one in a gust of passion to speak long together, or for another
15 in the same condition to suffer him without interruption. Grief and passion are like floods raised in little brooks by a sudden rain; they are quickly up, and if the concernment be poured unexpectedly in upon us, it overflows us: but a long sober shower gives them
20 leisure to run out as they came in, without troubling the ordinary current. As for comedy, repartee is one of its chiefest graces; the greatest pleasure of the audience is a chase of wit, kept up on both sides, and swiftly managed. And this our forefathers, if not we,
25 have had in Fletcher's plays, to a much higher degree of perfection than the French poets can reasonably hope to reach.

"There is another part of Lisideius his discourse, in which he has rather excused our neighbours than
30 commended them; that is, for aiming only to make one person considerable in their plays. 'Tis very true what he has urged, that one character in all plays, even without the poet's care, will have advantage of all the others; and that the design of the whole
35 drama will chiefly depend on it. But this hinders

not that there may be more shining characters in the play: many persons of a second magnitude, nay, some so very near, so almost equal to the first, that greatness may be opposed to greatness, and all the persons be made considerable, not only by their quality, but their action. 'Tis evident that the more the persons are, the greater will be the variety of the plot. If then the parts are managed so regularly that the beauty of the whole be kept entire, and that the variety become not a perplexed and confused mass of accidents, you will find it infinitely pleasing to be led in a labyrinth of design, where you see some of your way before you, yet discern not the end till you arrive at it. And that all this is practicable, I can produce for examples many of our English plays, as the *Maid's Tragedy*, the *Alchemist*, the *Silent Woman*: I was going to have named the *Fox*, but that the unity of design seems not exactly observed in it; for there appear two actions in the play; the first naturally ending with the fourth act, the second forced from it in the fifth; which yet is the less to be condemned in him, because the disguise of Volpone, though it suited not with his character as a crafty or covetous person, agreed well enough with that of a voluptuary, and by it the poet gained the end at which he aimed, the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue, both which that disguise produced. So that to judge equally of it, it was an excellent fifth act, but not so naturally proceeding from the former.

"But to leave this, and pass to the latter part of Lisideus his discourse, which concerns relations. I must acknowledge with him that the French have reason to hide that part of the action which would occasion too much tumult on the stage, and to choose rather to have it made known by narration to the

audience. Farther, I think it very convenient, for the reasons he has given, that all incredible actions were removed; but, whether custom has so insinuated itself into our countrymen, or nature has so formed them to fierceness, I know not; but they will scarcely suffer combats or other objects of horror to be taken from them. And indeed the indecency of tumults is all which can be objected against fighting: for why may not our imagination as well suffer itself to be deluded with the probability of it as with any other thing in the play? For my part, I can with as great ease persuade myself that the blows are given in good earnest, as I can that they who strike them are kings or princes, or those persons which they represent.

For objects of incredibility, I would be satisfied from Lisideius whether we have any so removed from all appearance of truth as are those of Corneille's *Andromède*? a play which has been frequented the most of any he has writ. If the Perseus, or the son of an heathen god, the Pegasus, and the Monster, were not capable to choke a strong belief, let him blame any representation of ours hereafter. Those indeed were objects of delight; yet the reason is the same as to the probability: for he makes it not a balette or masque, but a play, which is to resemble truth. But for Death, that it ought not to be represented, I have, besides the arguments alleged by Lisideius, the authority of Ben Johnson, who has forborne it in his tragedies; for both the death of Sejanus and Catiline are related: though in the latter I cannot but observe one irregularity of that great poet; he has removed the scene in the same act from Rome to Catiline's army, and from thence again to Rome; and besides, has allowed a very inconsiderable time, after Catiline's speech, for the striking of the battle and the return of Petreius,

who is to relate the event of it to the senate: which I should not animadvert on him, who was otherwise a painful observer of τὸ πρέπον, or the *decorum* of the stage, if he had not used extreme severity in his judgment on the incomparable Shakespeare for the same fault. To conclude on this subject of relations, if we are to be blamed for showing too much of the action, the French are as faulty for discovering too little of it: a mean betwixt both should be observed by every judicious writer, so as the audience may neither be left unsatisfied by not seeing what is beautiful, or shocked by beholding what is either incredible or undecent.

"I hope I have already proved in this discourse that though we are not altogether so punctual as the French in observing the laws of comedy, yet our errors are so few and little, and those things wherein we excel them so considerable, that we ought of right to be preferred before them. But what will Lisideius say if they themselves acknowledge they are too strictly bounded by those laws, for breaking which he has blamed the English? I will allege Corneille's words, as I find them in the end of his Discourse of the Three Unities *Il est facile aux spéculatifs d'être sévères, &c.* 'Tis easy for speculative people to judge severely, but if they would produce to public view ten or twelve pieces of this nature, they would perhaps give more latitude to the rules than I have done, when by experience they had known how much we are limited and constrained by them, and how many beauties of the stage they banished from it.' To illustrate a little what he has said: by their servile observations of the unities of time and place, and integrity of scenes, they have brought on themselves that dearth of plot and narrowness of

imagination which may be observed in all their plays. How many beautiful accidents might naturally happen in two or three days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of twenty-four hours? There
5 is time to be allowed also for maturity of design, which, amongst great and prudent persons, such as are often represented in tragedy, cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to pass at so short a warning. Farther, by tying themselves strictly to the
10 unity of place and unbroken scenes, they are forced many times to omit some beauties which cannot be shown where the act began, but might, if the scene were interrupted, and the stage cleared for the persons to enter in another place; and therefore the French
15 poets are often forced upon absurdities: for if the act begins in a chamber, all the persons in the play must have some business or other to come thither, or else they are not to be shown in that act; and sometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there:
20 as suppose it were the king's bedchamber, yet the meanest man in the tragedy must come and dispatch his business there, rather than in the lobby or courtyard (which is fitter for him), for fear the stage should be cleared and the scenes broken. Many times they
25 fall by it into a greater inconvenience; for they keep their scenes unbroken, and yet change the place; as in one of their newest plays, where the act begins in a street. There a gentleman is to meet his friend; he sees him with his man, coming out from his father's
30 house; they talk together, and the first goes out: the second, who is a lover, has made an appointment with his mistress; she appears at the window, and then we are to imagine the scene lies under it. This gentleman is called away, and leaves his servant with his
35 mistress; presently her father is heard from within;

the young lady is afraid the serving-man should be discovered, and thrusts him into a place of safety, which is supposed to be her closet. After this, the father enters to the daughter, and now the scene is in a house: for he is seeking from one room to another 5 for his poor Philipin, or French Diego, who is heard from within, drolling and breaking many a miserable conceit on the subject of his sad condition. In this ridiculous manner the play goes forward, the stage being never empty all the while. so that the street, 10 the window, the two houses, and the closet, are made to walk about, and the persons to stand still. Now what, I beseech you, is more easy than to write a regular French play, or more difficult than to write an irregular English one, like those of Fletcher or of 15 Shakespeare?

“If they content themselves, as Corneille did, with some flat design, which, like an ill riddle, is found out ere it be half proposed, such plots we can make every way regular as easily as they, but whenever they en- 20 deavour to rise to any quick turns and counter-turns of plot, as some of them have attempted, since Corneille's plays have been less in vogue, you see they write as irregularly as we, though they cover it more speciously. Hence the reason is perspicuous why no 25 French plays, when translated, have, or ever can succeed on the English stage. For, if you consider the plots, our own are fuller of variety; if the writing, ours are more quick and fuller of spirit and therefore 'tis a strange mistake in those who decry the way of writing 30 plays in verse, as if the English therein imitated the French. We have borrowed nothing from them, our plots are weaved in English looms: we endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from Shakespeare and 35

Fletcher; the copiousness and well-knit-
ing of the intrigues we have from Johnson; and for the verse
itself we have English precedents of elder date than any
of Corneille's plays. Not to name our old comedies
5 before Shakespeare, which were all writ in verse of
six feet, or Alexandrines, such as the French now use,
I can show in Shakespeare many scenes of rhyme
together, and the like in Ben Johnson's tragedies: in
Catiline and *Sejanus* sometimes thirty or forty lines,
10 I mean besides the chorus, or the monologues; which,
by the way, showed Ben no enemy to this way of
writing, especially if you read his *Sad Shepherd*, which
goes sometimes on rhyme, sometimes on blank verse,
like a horse who eases himself on trot and amble. You
15 find him likewise commending Fletcher's pastoral of
the *Faithful Shepherdess*, which is for the most part
rhyme, though not refined to that purity to which it
hath since been brought. And these examples are
enough to clear us from a servile imitation of the
20 French.

"But to return whence I have digressed, I dare
boldly affirm these two things of the English drama:
First, that we have many plays of ours as regular as
any of theirs, and which, besides, have more variety
25 of plot and characters; and secondly, that in most of
the irregular plays of Shakespeare or Fletcher (for Ben
Johnson's are for the most part regular), there is a
more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing
than there is in any of the French. I could produce
30 even in Shakespeare's and Fletcher's works some plays
which are almost exactly formed; as the *Merry Wives
of Windsor* and the *Scornful Lady*: but because,
generally speaking, Shakespeare, who writ first, did
not perfectly observe the laws of comedy, and Fletcher,
35 who came nearer to perfection, yet through careless-

ness made many faults, I will take the pattern of a perfect play from Ben Johnson, who was a careful and learned observer of the dramatic laws, and from all his comedies I shall select the *Silent Woman*; of which I will make a short examen, according to those rules which the French observe."

As Neander was beginning to examine the *Silent Woman*, Eugenius earnestly regarding him, "I beseech you, Neander," said he, "gratify the company, and me in particular, so far as, before you speak of the play, to give us a character of the author; and tell us frankly your opinion, whether you do not think all writers, both French and English, ought to give place to him?"

"I fear," replied Neander, "that in obeying your commands I shall draw some envy on myself. Besides, in performing them, it will be first necessary to speak somewhat of Shakespeare and Fletcher, his rivals in poesy; and one of them, in my opinion, at least his equal, perhaps his superior."

"To begin then with Shakespeare, he was the man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature. He looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike, were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of writers. He is many times flat, insipid, his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is at hand."

presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

- 5 The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of Eton say that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakespeare; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived,
 10 which had contemporaries with him Fletcher and Johnson, never equalled them to him in their esteem: and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakespeare far
 15 above him.

- "Beaumont and Fletcher, of whom I am next to speak, had, with the advantage of Shakespeare's wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study; Beaumont especially being so accurate a
 20 judge of plays, that Ben Johnson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure, and, 'tis thought, used his judgment in correcting, if not contriving, all his plots. What value he had for him appears by the verses he writ to him; and therefore I need speak no
 25 farther of it. The first play that brought Fletcher and him in esteem was their *Philaster*; for before that they had written two or three very unsuccessfully, as the like is reported of Ben Johnson before he writ *Every Man in his Humour*. Their plots were generally more
 30 regular than Shakespeare's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death; and they understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartees, no poet before them could paint as they

Roman authors of those times whom he has not translated in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. But he has done his robberies so openly that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any law. He invades authors like a monarch, and what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him. With the spoils of these writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its rites, ceremonies, and customs, that if one of their own poets had written either of his tragedies, we had seen less of it than in him. If there was any fault in his language, 'twas that he weaved it too closely and laboriously, in his comedies especially: perhaps, too, he did a little too much Romanize our tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latin as he found them: wherein, though he learnedly followed their language, he did not enough comply with the idiom of ours. If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Johnson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare. To conclude of him; as he has given us the most correct plays, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage as any where-with the French can furnish us.

"Having thus spoken of this author, I proceed to the examination of his comedy, the *Silent Woman*.

EXAMEN OF THE SILENT WOMAN

"To begin first with the length of the action; it is so far from exceeding the compass of a natural day, that it takes not up an artificial one. 'Tis all included in the limits of three hours and an half, which is no more than is required for the presentment on

the stage: a beauty perhaps not much observed; if it had, we should not have looked on the Spanish translation of *Five Hours* with so much wonder. The scene of it is laid in London; the latitude of place is almost as little as you can imagine; for it lies all within the compass of two houses, and after the first act, in one. The continuity of scenes is observed more than in any of our plays, except his own *Fox* and *Alchemist*. They are not broken above twice or thrice at most in the whole comedy; and in the two best of Corneille's plays, the *Cid* and *Cinna*, they are interrupted once. The action of the play is entirely one; the aim or end of which is the settling Morose's estate on Dauphine. The intrigue of it is the greatest and most noble of any pure unmixed comedy in any language; you see in it many persons of various characters and humours, and all delightful. as first, *Morose, or an old man, to whom all noise but his own talking is offensive*. Some who would be thought critics say this humour of his is forced: but to remove that objection, we may consider him first to be naturally of a delicate hearing, as many are to whom all sharp sounds are unpleasant; and secondly, we may attribute much of it to the peevishness of his age, or the wayward authority of an old man in his own house, where he may make himself obeyed; and to this the poet seems to allude in his name Morose. Besides this, I am assured from divers persons that Ben Johnson was actually acquainted with such a man, one altogether as ridiculous as he is here represented. Others say it is not enough to find one man of such an humour; it must be common to more, and the more common the more natural. To prove this, they instance in the best of comical characters, Falstaff. There are many men

resembling him; old, fat, merry, cowardly, drunken, amorous, vain, and lying. But to convince these people, I need but tell them that humour is the ridiculous extravagance of conversation, wherein one man differs
 5 from all others. If then it be common, or communicated to many, how differs it from other men's? or what indeed causes it to be ridiculous so much as the singularity of it? As for Falstaff, he is not properly one humour, but a miscellany of humours or images,
 10 drawn from so many several men: that wherein he is singular is his wit, or those things he says *præter expectatum*, unexpected by the audience; his quick evasions, when you imagine him surprised, which, as they are extremely diverting of themselves, so receive a great
 15 addition from his person; for the very sight of such an unwieldy old debauched fellow is a comedy alone. And here, having a place so proper for it, I cannot but enlarge somewhat upon this subject of humour into which I am fallen. The ancients had little of it in their comedies; for the τὸ γελοῖον of the old comedy, of which
 20 Aristophanes was chief, was not so much to imitate a man as to make the people laugh at some odd conceit, which had commonly somewhat of unnatural or obscene in it. Thus when you see Socrates brought
 25 upon the stage, you are not to imagine him made ridiculous by the imitation of his actions, but rather by making him perform something very unlike himself: something so childish and absurd as, by comparing it with the gravity of the true Socrates, makes a ridiculous
 30 object for the spectators. In their new comedy which succeeded, the poets sought indeed to express the ἥθος, as in their tragedies the πάθος of mankind. But this ἥθος contained only the general characters of men and manners; as old men, lovers, serving-men, court-
 35 zans, parasites, and such other persons as we see in their

comedies; all which they made alike: that is, one old man or father, one lover, one courtesan, so like another, as if the first of them had begot the rest of every sort: *Ex homine hunc natum dicas*. The same custom they observed likewise in their tragedies. As for the French, though they have the word *humeur* among them, yet they have small use of it in their comedies or farces; they being but ill imitations of the *ridiculum*, or that which stirred up laughter in the old comedy. But among the English 'tis otherwise: where by humour is meant some extravagant habit, passion, or affection, particular (as I said before) to some one person, by the oddness of which he is immediately distinguished from the rest of men; which being lively and naturally represented, most frequently begets that malicious pleasure in the audience which is testified by laughter; as all things which are deviations from customs are ever the aptest to produce it: though by the way this laughter is only accidental, as the person represented is fantastic or bizarre; but pleasure is essential to it, as the imitation of what is natural. The description of these humours, drawn from the knowledge and observation of particular persons, was the peculiar genius and talent of Ben Johnson; to whose play I now return.

"Besides Morose, there are at least nine or ten different characters and humours in the *Silent Woman*; all which persons have several concerns of their own, yet are all used by the poet to the conducting of the main design to perfection. I shall not waste time in commending the writing of this play, but I will give you my opinion that there is more wit and acuteness of fancy in it than in any of Ben Johnson's. Besides that he has here described the conversation of gentlemen in the persons of True-Wit and his friends, with

more gaiety, air, and freedom than in the rest of his comedies. For the contrivance of the plot, 'tis extreme elaborate, and yet withal easy; for the λύσις, or untying of it, 'tis so admirable that, when it is done, no one of the audience would think the poet could have missed it; and yet it was concealed so much before the last scene, that any other way would sooner have entered into your thoughts. But I dare not take upon me to commend the fabric of it, because it is altogether so full of art, that I must unravel every scene in it to commend it as I ought. And this excellent contrivance is still the more to be admired, because 'tis comedy where the persons are only of common rank, and their business private, not elevated by passions or high concernments as in serious plays. Here every one is a proper judge of all he sees; nothing is represented but that with which he daily converses: so that by consequence all faults lie open to discovery, and few are pardonable. 'Tis this which Horace has judiciously observed:

*Creditur, ex medio quia res arcessit, habere
Sudoris minimum; sed habet comedia tanto
Plus oneris, quanto veniæ minus.*

But our poet, who was not ignorant of these difficulties, has made use of all advantages; as he who designs a large leap takes his rise from the highest ground. One of these advantages is that which Corneille has laid down as the greatest which can arrive to any poem, and which he himself could never compass above thrice in all his plays; viz. the making choice of some signal and long-expected day whereon the action of the play is to depend. This day was that designed by Dauphine for the settling of his uncle's estate upon him; which to compass, he contrives to marry him. That the marriage had been plotted by him long before-

hand, is made evident by what he tells *True-Will* in the second act, that in one moment he had destroyed what he had been raising many months.

"There is another artifice of the poet, which I cannot here omit, because by the frequent practice of it in his comedies he has left it to us almost as a rule; that is, when he has any character or humour wherein he would show a *coup de maître*, or his highest skill, he recommends it to your observation by a pleasant description of it before the person first appears. Thus in *Bartholomew Fair* he gives you the picture of Numps and Cokes, and in this those of Daw, Lafoole, Morose, and the Collegiate Ladies; all which you hear described before you see them. So that before they come upon the stage, you have a longing expectation of them, which prepares you to receive them favourably; and when they are there, even from their first appearance you are so far acquainted with them, that nothing of their humour is lost to you.

"I will observe yet one thing further of this admirable plot; the business of it rises in every act. The second is greater than the first; the third, than the second; and so forward to the fifth. There too you see, till the very last scene, new difficulties arising to obstruct the action of the play; and when the audience is brought into despair that the business can naturally be effected then, and not before, the discovery is made. But that the poet might entertain you with more variety all the while, he reserves some new characters to show you which he opens not till the second and third act: the second *Morose*, *Daw*, the Barber, and *One*; the third the Collegiate Ladies: all which he introduces afterwards in by-ways, or under-plots, as diversions to the main design, lest it should grow tedious, though they are still naturally joined with it, and sometimes =

or other subservient to it. Thus, like a skilful chess-player, by little and little he draws out his men, and makes his pawns of use to his greater persons.

“ If this comedy and some others of his were translated into French prose (which would now be no wonder to them, since Molière has lately given them plays out of verse, which have not displeased them), I believe the controversy would soon be decided betwixt the two nations, even making them the judges. But we need not call our heroes to our aid. Be it spoken to the honour of the English, our nation can never want in any age such who are able to dispute the empire of wit with any people in the universe. And though the fury of a civil war, and power for twenty years together abandoned to a barbarous race of men, enemies of all good learning, had buried the muses under the ruins of monarchy, yet, with the restoration of our happiness, we see revived poesy lifting up its head, and already shaking off the rubbish which lay so heavy on it. We have seen since his majesty's return many dramatic poems which yield not to those of any foreign nation, and which deserve all laurels but the English. I will set aside flattery and envy: it cannot be denied but we have had some little blemish either in the plot or writing of all those plays which have been made within these seven years; and perhaps there is no nation in the world so quick to discern them, or so difficult to pardon them, as ours: yet if we can persuade ourselves to use the candour of that poet, who, though the most severe of critics, has left us this caution by which to moderate our censures,

. . . *Ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendar maculis;*

if, in consideration of their many and great beauties, we can wink at some slight and little imperfections; if we,

I say, can be thus equal to ourselves, I ask no favour from the French. And if I do not venture upon any particular judgment of our late plays, 'tis out of the consideration which an ancient writer gives me: *Vivorum, ut magna admiratio, ita censura difficilis*: betwixt the extremes of admiration and malice, 'tis hard to judge uprightly of the living. Only I think it may be permitted me to say that as it is no lessening to us to yield to some plays, and those not many, of our nation in the last age, so can it be no addition to pronounce of our present poets that they have far surpassed all the ancients, and the modern writers of other countries."

This was the substance of what was then spoke on that occasion; and Lisideus, I think, was going to reply, when he was prevented thus by Cntes. "I am confident," said he, "that the most material things that can be said have been already urged on either side; if they have not, I must beg of Lisideus that he will defer his answer till another time. for I confess I have a joint quarrel to you both, because you have concluded, without any reason given for it, that rhyme is proper for the stage. I will not dispute how ancient it hath been among us to write this way, perhaps our ancestors knew no better till Shakespeare's time I will grant it was not altogether left by him, and that Fletcher and Ben Johnson used it frequently in their pastorals, and sometimes in other plays. Farther, I will not argue whether we received it originally from our countrymen or from the French, for that is an inquiry of as little benefit as theirs who, in the midst of the late plague, were not so solicitous to provide against it as to know whether we had it from the malignity of our own air or by transportation from Holland. I have therefore only to affirm that it is not

in serious play. To pre-
cluding with me. To pre-
self to tell you how much in vain it is to
ive against the stream of the people's incli-
ne greatest part of which are prepossessed
with those excellent plays of Shakespeare,
and Ben Johnson, which have been written
hyme, that, except you could bring them such
written better in it, and those too by persons
al reputation with them, it would be impossible
to gain your cause with them, who will still be
s. This it is to which, in fine, all your reasons
submit. The unanimous consent of an audience
powerful that even Julius Cæsar (as Macrobius
rts of him), when he was perpetual dictator, was
able to balance it on the other side; but when
erius, a Roman knight, at his request contended
the *Mime* with another poet, he was forced to cry
t, *Etiam favente me victus es, Laberi*. But I will not
n this occasion take the advantage of the greater
umber, but only urge such reasons against rhyme as
find in the writings of those who have argued for the
other way. First then, I am of opinion that rhyme
is unnatural in a play, because dialogue there is pre-
sented as the effect of sudden thought. For a play is
the imitation of nature; and since no man, without
premeditation, speaks in rhyme, neither ought he to do
it on the stage. This hinders not but the fancy may
be there elevated to an higher pitch of thought than it
is in ordinary discourse; for there is a probability that
men of excellent and quick parts may speak noble
things *ex tempore*: but those thoughts are never fettered
with the numbers or sound of verse without study, and
therefore it cannot be but unnatural to present the
35 most free way of speaking in that which is the most

unstrained. For this reason, says Aristotle, 'tis best to write tragedy in that kind of verse which is the least such, or which is nearest prose: and this amongst the ancients was the iambic, and with us is blank verse, or the measure of verse kept exactly without rhyme. 5
These numbers therefore are fittest for a play; the others for a paper of verses, or a poem; blank verse being as much below them as rhyme is improper for the drama. And if it be objected that neither are blank verses made *ex tempore*, yet, as nearest nature, 10 they are still to be preferred. But there are two particular exceptions, which many besides myself have had to verse; by which it will appear yet more plainly how improper it is in plays. And the first of them is grounded on that very reason for which some have 15 commended rhyme: they say the quickness of repartees in argumentative scenes receives an ornament from verse. Now what is more unreasonable than to imagine that a man should not only light upon the wit, but the rhyme too, upon the sudden? This nicking 20 of him who spoke before both in sound and measure is so great a happiness that you must at least suppose the persons of your play to be born poets, *Arcades omnes, et carlare pares et respondere parati* they must have arrived to the degree of *quicquid conabar dicere*, to 25 make verses almost whether they will or no. If they are anything below this, it will look rather like the design of two than the answer of one; it will appear that your actors hold intelligence together, that they perform their tricks like fortune-tellers, by confederacy. 30 The hand of art will be too visible in it against that maxim of all professions, *Ars est celare artem* that it is the greatest perfection of art to keep itself undiscovered. Nor will it serve you to object that, however you manage it, 'tis still known to be a play; and, conse- 35

quently, the dialogue of two persons understood to be the labour of one poet. For a play is still an imitation of nature; we know we are to be deceived, and we desire to be so; but no man ever was deceived but
 5 with a probability of truth, for who will suffer a gross lie to be fastened upon him? Thus we sufficiently understand that the scenes which represent cities and countries to us are not really such but only painted
 10 on boards and canvas: but shall that excuse the ill painture or designment of them? Nay, rather ought they not to be laboured with so much the more diligence and exactness to help the imagination? since the mind of man does naturally tend to truth, and therefore the nearer anything comes to the imitation
 15 of it, the more it pleases.

“Thus, you see, your rhyme is incapable of expressing the greatest thought naturally, and the lowest it cannot with any grace: for what is more unbecoming the majesty of verse than to call a servant or bid a door be
 20 shut in rhyme? And yet you are often forced on this miserable necessity. But verse, you say, circumscribes a quick and luxuriant fancy, which would extend itself too far on every subject, did not the labour which is required to well-turned and polished rhyme, set bounds
 25 to it. Yet this argument, if granted, would only prove that we may write better in verse, but not more naturally. Neither is it able to evince that; for he who wants judgment to confine his fancy in blank verse, may want it as much in rhyme; and he who has it will
 30 avoid errors in both kinds. Latin verse was as great a confinement to the imagination of those poets as rhyme to ours: and yet you find Ovid saying too much on every subject. *Nescivit* (says Seneca) *quod bene cessit relinquere*: of which he gives you one famous instance
 35 in his description of the deluge,

than, from the faults or defects of ill rhyme, to conclude against the use of it in general. May not I conclude against blank verse by the same reason? If the words of some poets who write in it are either ill-chosen or
5 ill-placed (which makes not only rhyme, but all kind of verse in any language unnatural), shall I, for their vicious affectation, condemn those excellent lines of Fletcher which are written in that kind? Is there anything in rhyme more constrained than this line in
10 blank verse?—*I heaven invoke, and strong resistance make*; where you see both the clauses are placed unnaturally, that is, contrary to the common way of speaking, and that without the excuse of a rhyme to cause it: yet you would think me very ridiculous if I should
15 accuse the stubbornness of blank verse for this, and not rather the stiffness of the poet. Therefore, Crites, you must either prove that words, though well chosen and duly placed, yet render not rhyme natural in itself; or that, however natural and easy the rhyme may be,
20 yet it is not proper for a play. If you insist on the former part, I would ask you what other conditions are required to make rhyme natural in itself, besides an election of apt words and a right disposition of them? For the due choice of your words expresses your sense
25 naturally, and the due placing them adapts the rhyme to it. If you object that one verse may be made for the sake of another, though both the words and rhyme be apt, I answer it cannot possibly so fall out; for either there is a dependence of sense betwixt the first
30 line and the second, or there is none: if there be that connection, then in the natural position of the words the latter line must of necessity flow from the former; if there be no dependence, yet still the due ordering of words makes the last line as natural in itself as the
35 other: so that the necessity of a rhyme never forces

any but bad or lazy writers to say what they would not otherwise. 'Tis true, there is both care and art required to write in verse. A good poet never establishes the first line till he has sought out such a rhyme as may fit the sense, already prepared to heighten the second: many times the close of the sense falls into the middle of the next verse, or farther off, and he may often prevail himself of the same advantages in English which Virgil had in Latin, he may break off in the hemistich and begin another line. Indeed, the not observing these two last things makes plays which are writ in verse so tedious: for though, most commonly, the sense is to be confined to the couplet, yet nothing that does *perfecta lenire fuerit*, run in the same channel, can please always. 'Tis like the murmuring of a stream, which, not varying in the fall, causes at first attention, at last drowsiness. Variety of cadences is the best rule the greatest help to the actors, and refreshment to the audience.

"If then verse may be made natural in itself, how becomes it unnatural in a play? You say the stage is the representation of nature, and no man in ordinary conversation speaks in rhyme. But you forget, when you said this, that it might be *argued* neither does any man speak in blank verse or in measure without rhyme. Therefore you conclude that which is nearest nature is still to be *rejected*. But you took no notice that rhyme might be made as natural as blank verse, by the well placing of the words, &c. All the difference between them when they are both correct, is the sound to one ear the other wants; and if so, the sweetness of a line is the advantage resulting from it, which are *mentioned* in the Preface to the *Rival Ladies*, will yet *more* *gain* *the* *stage*

for that place of Aristotle where he says plays should be writ in that kind of verse which is nearest prose, it makes little for you, blank verse being properly but measured prose. Now measure alone, in any modern
5 language, does not constitute verse; those of the ancients in Greek and Latin consisted in quantity of words and a determinate number of feet. But when, by the inundation of the Goths and Vandals into
10 Italy, new languages were introduced, and barbarously mingled with the Latin, of which the Italian, Spanish, French, and ours (made out of them and the Teutonic) are dialects, a new way of poesy was practised; new, I say, in those countries, for in all probability it was that of the conquerors in their own nations: at least
15 we are able to prove that the Eastern people have used it from all antiquity (*Vide* Daniel his *Defence of Rhyme*). This new way consisted in measure or number of feet, and rhyme; the sweetness of rhyme and observation of accent supplying the place of quantity
20 in words, which could neither exactly be observed by those barbarians, who knew not the rules of it, neither was it suitable to their tongues, as it had been to the Greek and Latin. No man is tied in modern poesy to observe any farther rule in the feet of his verse but
25 that they be dissyllables; whether spondee, trochee, or iambic, it matters not; only he is obliged to rhyme. Neither do the Spanish, French, Italian, or Germans acknowledge at all, or very rarely, any such kind of poesy as blank verse amongst them. Therefore, at
30 most, 'tis but a poetic prose, a *sermo pedestris*, and, as such, most fit for comedies, where I acknowledge rhyme to be improper. Farther, as to that quotation of Aristotle, our couplet verses may be rendered as near prose as blank verse itself by using those advantages I
35 lately named, as breaks in an hemistich, or running the

sense into another line, thereby making art and order appear as loose and free as nature; or, not tying ourselves to couplets strictly, we may use the benefit of the Pindaric way, practised in the *Siege of Rhodes*, where the numbers vary, and the rhyme is disposed carelessly, and far from often chiming. Neither is that other advantage of the ancients to be despised, of changing the kind of verse when they please with the change of the scene or some new entrance; for they confine not themselves always to iambics, but extend their liberty to all lyric numbers, and sometimes even to hexameter. But I need not go so far to prove that rhyme, as it succeeds to all other offices of Greek and Latin verse, so especially to this of plays, since the custom of nations at this day confirms it; the French, Italian, and Spanish tragedies are generally writ in it; and sure the universal consent of the most civilized parts of the world ought in this, as it doth in other customs, to include the rest.

"But perhaps you may tell me I have proposed such a way to make rhyme natural, and consequently proper to plays, as is impracticable, and that I shall scarce find six or eight lines together in any play, where the words are so placed and chosen as is required to make it natural. I answer, no poet need constrain himself at all times to it. It is enough he makes it his general rule; for I deny not but sometimes there may be a greatness in placing the words otherwise, and sometimes they may sound better, sometimes also the variety itself is excuse enough. But if, for the most part, the words be placed as they are in the negligence of prose, it is sufficient to denominate the way practicable, for we esteem that to be such which in the trial oftener succeeds than misses. And thus far you may find the practice made good in many

plays: where you do not, remember still that if you cannot find six natural rhymes together, it will be as hard for you to produce as many lines in blank verse, even among the greatest of our poets, against which
5 I cannot make some reasonable exception.

“And this, sir, calls to my remembrance the beginning of your discourse, where you told us we should never find the audience favourable to this kind of writing till we could produce as good plays in rhyme
10 as Ben Johnson, Fletcher, and Shakespeare had writ out of it. But it is to raise envy to the living to compare them with the dead. They are honoured, and almost adored by us, as they deserve; neither do I know any so presumptuous of themselves as to con-
15 tend with them. Yet give me leave to say thus much, without injury to their ashes, that not only we shall never equal them, but they could never equal themselves were they to rise and write again. We acknowledge them our fathers in wit, but they have ruined
20 their estates themselves before they came to their children’s hands. There is scarce an humour, a character, or any kind of plot, which they have not used. All comes sullied or wasted to us: and were they to entertain this age, they could not now make so plentiful
25 treatments out of such decayed fortunes. This, therefore, will be a good argument to us, either not to write at all, or to attempt some other way. There is no bays to be expected in their walks: *Tentanda via est qua me quoque possum tollere humo.*

30 “This way of writing in verse they have only left free to us; our age is arrived to a perfection in it which they never knew, and which (if we may guess by what of theirs we have seen in verse, as the *Faithful Shepherdess* and *Sad Shepherd*) ’tis probable they never
35 could have reached. For the genius of every age is

different: and though ours excel in this, I deny not but that to imitate nature in that perfection which they did in prose, is a greater commendation than to write in verse exactly. As for what you have added, that the people are not generally inclined to like this way, if it were true, it would be no wonder that betwixt the shaking off an old habit and the introducing of a new there should be difficulty. Do we not see them stick to Hopkins and Sternhold's psalms, and forsake those of David, I mean Sandys his translation of them? If by the people you understand the multitude, the *οἱ πολλοί*, 'tis no matter what they think; they are sometimes in the right, sometimes in the wrong: their judgment is a mere lottery. *Est ubi plebs recte putat, est ubi peccat.* Horace says it of the vulgar, judging poesy. But if you mean the mixed audience of the populace and the noblesse, I dare confidently affirm that a great part of the latter sort are already favourable to verse, and that no serious plays written since the king's return have been more kindly received by them than the *Siege of Rhodes*, the *Mustopha*, the *Indian Queen*, and *Indian Emperor*.

"But I come now to the inference of your first argument. You said that the dialogue of plays is presented as the effect of sudden thought, but no one speaks suddenly or *ex tempore* in rhyme; and you inferred from thence that rhyme, which you acknowledge to be proper to epic poesy, cannot equally be proper to dramatic, unless we could suppose all men born so much more than poets that verses should be made in them, not by them.

It has been formerly urged by you, and confessed by me, that since no man spoke any kind of verse *ex tempore*, that which was nearest nature was to be :

preferred. I answer you, therefore, by distinguishing betwixt what is nearest to the nature of comedy, which is the imitation of common persons and ordinary speaking, and what is nearest the nature of a
 5 serious play. This last is indeed the representation of nature, but 'tis nature wrought up to an higher pitch. The plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions are all exalted above the level of
 10 common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimilitude. Tragedy, we know, is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray these exactly; heroic rhyme is nearest nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.

15 *Indignatur enim privatis et prope socco
 Dignis carminibus narrari cena Thyestae,*

says Horace. And in another place,

Effutire leves indigna tragoedia versus,

Blank verse is acknowledged to be too low for a
 20 poem; nay more, for a paper of verses; but if too low for an ordinary sonnet, how much more for tragedy, which is by Aristotle, in the dispute betwixt the epic poesy and the dramatic, for many reasons he there alleges, ranked above it?

25 "But setting this defence aside, your argument is almost as strong against the use of rhyme in poems as in plays; for the epic way is everywhere interlaced with dialogue or discursive scenes; and therefore you must either grant rhyme to be improper there,
 30 which is contrary to your assertion, or admit it into plays by the same title which you have given it to poems. For though tragedy be justly preferred above the other, yet there is a great affinity between them, as

may easily be discovered in that definition of a play which *Lisideus* gave us. The *genus* of them is the same, a just and lively image of human nature in its actions, passions, and traverses of fortune: so is the end, namely for the delight and benefit of mankind. The characters and persons are still the same, viz. the greatest of both sorts; only the manner of acquainting us with those actions, passions, and fortunes is different. Tragedy performs it *viva voce*, or by action in dialogue; wherein it excels the epic poem, which does it chiefly by narration, and therefore is not so lively an image of human nature. However, the agreement betwixt them is such that if rhyme be proper for one, it must be for the other. Verse, 'tis true, is not the effect of sudden thought; but this hinders not that sudden thought may be represented in verse, since those thoughts are such as must be higher than nature can raise them without premeditation, especially to a continuance of them even out of verse; and consequently you cannot imagine them to have been sudden either in the poet or the actors. A play, as I have said, to be like nature, is to be set above it; as statues which are placed on high are made greater than the life that they may descend to the sight in their just proportion.

"Perhaps I have insisted too long upon this objection; but the clearing of it will make my stay shorter on the rest. You tell us, *Critics*, that rhyme appears most unnatural in repartees or short replies. when he who answers (it being presumed he knew not what the other would say, yet) makes up that part of the verse which was left incomplete, and supplies both the sound and measure of it. This, you say, looks rather like the confederacy of two than the answer of one

"This, I confess, is an objection which is in every

man's mouth who loves not rhyme; but suppose, I beseech you, the repartee were made only in blank verse, might not part of the same argument be turned against you? for the measure is as often supplied
5 there as it is in rhyme; the latter half of the hemistich as commonly made up, or a second line subjoined as a reply to the former; which any one leaf in Johnson's plays will sufficiently clear to you. You will often find in the Greek tragedians, and in Seneca, that
10 when a scene grows up into the warmth of repartees (which is the close fighting of it), the latter part of the trimeter is supplied by him who answers; and yet it was never observed as a fault in them by any of the ancient or modern critics. The case is the same in
15 our verse as it was in theirs: rhyme to us being in lieu of quantity to them. But if no latitude is to be allowed a poet, you take from him not only his license of *quidlibet audendi*, but you tie him up in a straiter compass than you would a philosopher. This is in-
20 deed *Musas colere severiores*. You would have him follow nature, but he must follow her on foot: you have dismounted him from his Pegasus. But you tell us this supplying the last half of a verse, or adjoining a whole second to the former, looks more like the design
25 of two than the answer of one. Suppose we acknowledge it: how comes this confederacy to be more displeasing to you than a dance which is well contrived? You see there the united design of many persons to make up one figure: after they have
30 separated themselves in many petty divisions, they rejoin one by one into a gross: the confederacy is plain amongst them, for chance could never produce anything so beautiful; and yet there is nothing in it that shocks your sight. I acknowledge the hand
35 of art appears in repartee, as of necessity it must in

all kind of verse. But there is also the quick and poignant brevity of it (which is an high imitation of nature in those sudden gusts of passion) to mingle with it: and this, joined with the cadency and sweetness of the rhyme, leaves nothing in the soul of the hearer to desire. 'Tis an art which appears; but it appears only like the shadowings of painture, which, being to cause the rounding of it, cannot be absent; but while that is considered, they are lost: so while we attend to the other beauties of the matter, the care and labour of the rhyme is carried from us, or at least drowned in its own sweetness, as bees are sometimes buried in their honey. When a poet has found the repartee, the last perfection he can add to it is to put it into verse. However good the thought may be, however apt the words in which 'tis couched, yet he finds himself at a little unrest while rhyme is wanting: he cannot leave it till that comes naturally, and then is at ease, and sits down contented.

"From replies, which are the most elevated thoughts of verse, you pass to those which are most mean, and which are common with the lowest of household conversation. In these, you say, the majesty of verse suffers. You instance in the calling of a servant or commanding a door to be shut in rhyme. This, Crites, is a good observation of yours, but no argument: for it proves no more but that such thoughts should be waived, as often as may be, by the address of the poet. But suppose they are necessary in the places where he uses them, yet there is no need to put them into rhyme. He may place them in the beginning of a verse, and break it off as unfit, when so debased, for any other use; or granting the worst, that they require more room than the hemistich will allow, yet still there is a choice to be made of the best words,

and least vulgar, provided they be apt to express such thoughts. Many have blamed rhyme in general for this fault, when the poet, with a little care, might have redressed it. But they do it with no more justice
 5 than if English poesy should be made ridiculous for the sake of the Water-poet's rhymes. Our language is noble, full, and significant; and I know not why he who is master of it may not clothe ordinary things in it as decently as the Latin, if he use the same
 10 diligence in his choice of words:

Delectus verborum origo est eloquentiæ.

It was the saying of Julius Caesar, one so curious in his, that none of them can be changed but for a worse. One would think 'unlock the door' was a
 15 thing as vulgar as could be spoken; and yet Seneca could make it sound high and lofty in his Latin:

Reserate clusos regii postes laris.
 Set wide the palace gates.

"But I turn from this exception, both because it
 20 happens not above twice or thrice in any play that those vulgar thoughts are used: and then too, were there no other apology to be made, yet the necessity of them, which is alike in all kind of writing, may excuse them. For if they are little and mean in rhyme,
 25 they are of consequence such in blank verse. Besides that the great eagerness and precipitation with which they are spoken makes us rather mind the substance than the dress; that for which they are spoken rather than what is spoke. For they are always the effect
 30 of some hasty concernment, and something of consequence depends on them.

"Thus, Crites, I have endeavoured to answer your objections. It remains only that I should vindicate

an argument for verse which you have gone about to overthrow. It had formerly been said that the easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant, but that the labour of rhyme bounds and circumscribes an over-fruited fancy; the sense there being commonly confined to the couplet, and the words so ordered that the rhyme naturally follows them, not they the rhyme. To this you answered that it was no argument to the question in hand, for the dispute was not which way a man may write best, but which is most proper for the subject on which he writes.

"First, says he, let us, etc. to remember you that the

write in verse was proper for serious plays. Which supposition being granted (as it was briefly made out in that discourse, by showing how verse might be made natural), it asserted that this way of writing was an help to the poet's judgment, by putting bounds to a wild overflowing fancy. I think therefore it will not be hard for me to make good what it was to prove on that supposition. But you add that, were this let pass, yet he who wants judgment in the liberty of his fancy, may as well show the defect of it when he is confined to verse; for he who has judgment will avoid errors, and he who has it not will commit them in all kinds of writing.

"This argument, as you have taken it from a most acute person, so, I confess, it carries much weight in it. But by using the word judgment here indefinitely, you seem to have put a fallacy upon us. I grant he who has judgment, that is, so profound, so strong, or rather so infallible a judgment that he needs no helps to keep it always poised and upright, will commit no faults either in rhyme or out of it. and, on the other

extreme, he who has a judgment so weak and crazed that no helps can correct or amend it, shall write scurvily out of rhyme, and worse in it. But the first of these judgments is nowhere to be found, and the latter is not fit to write at all. To speak therefore of judgment as it is in the best poets, they who have the greatest proportion of it want other helps than from it within: as for example, you would be loath to say that he who is endued with a sound judgment has no need of history, geography, or moral philosophy, to write correctly. Judgment is indeed the master-workman in a play; but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance. And verse I affirm to be one of these; 'tis a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely; at least if the poet commits errors with this help, he would make greater and more without it: 'tis, in short, a slow and painful, but the surest kind of working. Ovid, whom you accuse for luxuriancy in verse, had perhaps been farther guilty of it had he writ in prose. And for your instance of Ben Johnson, who, you say, writ exactly without the help of rhyme; you are to remember 'tis only an aid to a luxuriant fancy, which his was not: as he did not want imagination, so none ever said he had much to spare. Neither was verse then refined so much to be an help to that age as it is to ours. Thus then the second thoughts being usually the best, as receiving the maturest digestion from judgment, and the last and most mature product of those thoughts being artful and laboured verse, it may well be inferred that verse is a great help to a luxuriant fancy; and this is what that argument which you opposed was to evince."

Neander was pursuing this discourse so eagerly

that Eugenius had called to him twice or thrice ere he took notice that the barge stood still, and that they were at the foot of Somerset-Stairs, where they had appointed it to land. The company were all sorry to separate so soon, though a great part of the evening was already spent; and stood awhile looking back on the water, upon which the moonbeams played, and made it appear like floating quicksilver. At last they went up through a crowd of French people who were merrily dancing in the open air, and nothing concerned for the noise of guns which had alarmed the town that afternoon. Walking thence together to the Piazza, they parted there, Eugenius and Lisideius to some pleasant appointment they had made, and Crites and Neander to their several lodgings.

NOTES

DEDICATION

page xxiv. Charles Earl of Dorset and Middlesex. Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst (1638-1706), was made Earl of Middlesex in 1675, and succeeded his father as sixth Earl of Dorset in 1677. The dedication in the first edition of the *Essay* (1668) was "To the Right Honourable Charles Lord Buckhurst", Dorset's earlier title. Apparently by oversight this dedication was retained in the edition of 1684. He was Lord Chamberlain of the Household from 1689 to 1697, and received the Garter in 1691. See note on *Eugenius*, *infra*, p. 1.

l. 10. the last plague, the great plague of 1665. The theatres were closed from May, 1665, till November, 1666. Dryden withdrew to Charlton in Wiltshire, a seat of his father-in-law, the Earl of Berkshire, and it was probably here that he wrote this *Essay*, as well as the *Annus Mirabilis*. (See the *To the Reader*, l. 7.)

l. 19. the way of writing plays in verse. Dryden's *Rival Ladies* (1664) was partly in rhyme, and the *Indian Emperor* (1665) wholly so. On the reopening of the theatres he produced chiefly prose comedies; but in 1669, after an interval of four years, he returned to the "practice" which want of leisure had made him "lay aside", and in *Tyrannic Love* (1669) and the *Conquest of Granada* (1670) produced his most characteristic rhymed plays. It was not till 1675 that he finally grew "weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme" (Prologue to *Aurengzebe*). His next play, *All for Love* (1678), was in blank verse.

The remark that "none are very violent against it but those who either have not attempted it, or who have succeeded ill in their attempt", is a sly hit at Sir Robert Howard. With the help of Dryden he had written his *Indian Queen* (1664) entirely in rhyme, and he had employed it also in his *Vestal*

Virgin; but in the preface to a collection entitled *Four New Plays* (1665), in which these two plays were first published, he argues against its use. "But while I give these arguments against verse," he says, "I may seem faulty that I have not only writ ill ones, but writ any; but since it was the fashion, I was resolved, as in all indifferent things, not to appear singular, the danger of the vanity being greater than the error; and therefore I followed it as a fashion, though very far off." Howard recognized Dryden's reference, and alluded to it in the preface to the *Duke of Lerma* (1668): see Appendix, p. 126.

l. 31. the fourth act of *Pompey*. A translation of Corneille's *Mort de Pompée* appeared in 1664, under the title "Pompey the Great, a tragedy, translated out of French by certain persons of honour". The first act was translated by Waller; the fourth act, according to Dryden, was by Buckhurst; and the remainder is said to be by Sidney Godolphin and Sir Charles Sedley.

page xxv, l. 9. *Spurina*. Valerius Maximus, iv. 5.

ll. 17, 18. *Pars indocili*, &c. Horace, *Epodes*, xvi. 37, 38.

l. 23. allowed, approved. This sense was common in Elizabethan English, but was beginning to fall out of use by the time of Dryden. From O.F. *alouer*, which represents both Lat. *allaudare*, to praise, and *allocare*, to place; hence the two senses, which often blend, of 'approving' and 'granting'.

ll. 32-36. *Le jeune homme*, &c. The author of these lines is still undiscovered.

page xxvi, ll. 12-15. As *Nature*, &c. From Sir William Davenant's "Poem to the King's most sacred Majesty" (Davenant's *Works*, 1673 folio, p. 268.) The inaccuracies in the quotation are unimportant.

l. 21. Homer tells us. *Iliad* xvi.

ll. 28, 29. their opinions...made public. Dryden first urged the advantages of the rhymed couplet over blank verse in the drama in the Dedication to the *Rival Ladies* (1664). Howard replied in the following year in the Preface to his *Four New Plays*. (See notes, page 62, l. 23, and page 64, l. 21.)

page xxvii, ll. 3, &c. Tully...in one of his dialogues, in the *De Legibus*.

ll. 8, &c. Tully...Cato. See Plutarch's *Life of Caesar*, liv., and Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, xii. 40.

l. 23. *sine studio partium aut ira*. The correct quotation is, "*Sine ira et studio, quorum causas procul habeo*": Tacitus, *Annals*, i. 1.

TO THE READER

In the first edition the concluding lines were: "I promise to myself a better success of the Second Part, wherein the virtues and faults of the English poets who have written either in this, the epic, or the lyric way will be more fully treated of, and their several styles impartially imitated". This Second Part was never written, though Dryden dealt with the epic in the *Dedication of the Aeneis* (1697), sometimes entitled *A Discourse on Epic Poetry*.

THE ESSAY

page 1, l. 1. that memorable day, 3rd June, 1665. The battle took place off Lowestoft in Suffolk, the English fleet being commanded by the Duke of York, afterwards James II. Eighteen Dutch ships were taken, and fourteen others destroyed. War had been declared in February, 1665.

ll. 11, 12. the noise of the cannon reached our ears. Dryden alludes to this circumstance also in his *Verses to the Duchess of York*, celebrating the victory gained by her husband:

While from afar we heard the cannon play,
Like distant thunder on a shiny day.

See the "Globe" *Dryden*, p. 33 n.

l. 17. the park, St. James's Park.

cross, across: an old usage, now dialectal.

l. 19. *Eugenius* is the "borrowed name" of Lord Buckhurst, to whom the *Essay* is dedicated. Doubt has been cast on the identity, as there is no reference to it in the *Dedication*, and from the fact that Buckhurst actually took part in the battle of 3rd June; but it must be remembered that the meeting of the four critics and all the circumstances of the *Essay* are purely imaginative, and that Dryden had no call to refer specifically, in a public dedication, to the part he had made his patron play. The doubt raised by the historical inaccuracy is outweighed by the definite statement of Matthew Prior—in the *Dedication* of his own poems to Buckhurst's son—that "Dryden determines by him, under the character of *Eugenius*,

as to the Laws of Dramatic Poetry"; and certain references in the *Essay* (e.g. p. 15, l. 23) should help to set all doubt at rest.

Buckhurst's best-known work is the song "To all you ladies now at land". He is said by Prior to have composed it on the night before the battle with the Dutch fleet, but it is more probable that he only retouched or finished it then. (See Johnson's *Life of Dorset*.) He had a great reputation, and is referred to by Addison as "one of the finest critics as well as the best poets of his age" (*Spectator*, No. 85).

l. 20. *Crites* represents Sir Robert Howard (1626-1698), son of the Earl of Berkshire, and Dryden's brother-in-law. He held the post of Auditor of the Exchequer. In 1665 he published "four new plays"—the *Surprisal*, the *Committee*, the *Indian Queen*, and the *Vestal Virgin*—the general preface to which contains most of the arguments put into the mouth of the *Crites* of the *Essay*. The preface to his *Great Favourite, or the Duke of Lerma* (1668) contains his reply to the criticisms of Neander. He published also a volume of poems and several prose historical works. Dryden's reference to him as "a person of a sharp judgment, and somewhat too delicate a taste in wit, which the world have mistaken in him for ill-nature" is borne out by Evelyn's description of him as "a gentleman pretending to all manner of arts and sciences, . . . not ill-natured, but insufferably boasting" (*Diary*, 16th February, 1684-5). Shadwell satirized him in the *Sullen Lovers* under the character of Sir Positive At-All.

Lisideius is Sir Charles Sedley, or Sidley (1639-1701), *Lisideius* being an anagram of the Latin form *Sidleius*. He wrote several dramas, the best of which are the *Mulberry Garden* and *Bellamira*; but his reputation rests chiefly on his lyrics. In the Dedication to the *Assignation* (1672) Dryden alludes to him as the Tibullus of the age. He and Buckhurst were great friends, and they rivalled each other in reputation.

Neander is Dryden himself. He took this name apparently to mark his social distinction from the "three persons of quality", Neander meaning literally a "novus homo" or parvenu.

page 3, l. 11. *conceit* appears in the editions of 1668 and 1684 as *conceipt*. This form had been common in Elizabethan English, but its alteration to the present form in the edition

of 1693 is significant. As there is apparently no corresponding word in Old French, *conceit* or *concept* was probably formed from *conceive* on the analogy of *deceit* or *receipt*.

l. 17. seditious preachers. The Act of Uniformity (1662), the Conventicle Act (1664), and the Five Mile Act (1665) were all framed for the suppression of "seditious preachers".

ll. 23, &c. Quem in concione, &c. Cicero, *Pro Archia*, x.

ll. 32, &c. two poets. Though there is no definite information as to who these poets are, there is little doubt that the former is Dr. Robert Wild (1609-1679). In 1660 he published *Iler Boreale*, a poem "attempting something upon the successful and matchless march of the Lord General George Monk from Scotland to London, in the winter 1659". It enjoyed great popularity, as is shown by its numerous editions, and is presumably the "famous poem" referred to as having been read "in the midst of Change time". Wild celebrated the defeat of the Dutch in *An Essay upon the late victory obtained by the Duke of York upon June 3, 1665* (licensed 16th June). The opening lines will show that his verse answers exactly to Dryden's criticism.

Gout! I conjure thee by the powerful names
Of Charles and James, and their victorious fames,
On this great day set all thy prisoners free.
Triumph demands a gaol delivery.
Set them all free, leave not a limping toe
From my Lord Chancellor to mine below.
Unless thou giv'st us leave this day to dance,
Thou art not the old loyal gout, but com'st from France.
'Tis done! my grief obeys the sovereign charms,
I feel a bonfire in my joints, which warms
And thaws the frozen jelly; I am grown
Twenty years younger; victory hath done
What puzzled physic: give the Dutch a rout,
Probatum est, 'twill cure an English gout!
Come then, put nimble socks upon my feet,
They shall be skippers to your royal fleet,
Which now returns in dances on our seas,
A conqueror above hyperboles

There is more doubt as to the identity of the other poet, but he was probably Richard Flecknoe (d. 1678), the common butt of Dryden's ridicule. The victory was not able to escape him

either, and it inspired him to the following address to the Duke of York:—

More famous and more great than ere
 Cæsar or Alexander were!
 Who hath both done and outdone too
 What those great heroes could not do.
 Till empire of the seas we get,
 No victory can be complete:
 For land and sea makes but one ball;
 They had but half, thou hast it all.
 Great prince, the glory of our days,
 And utmost bound of human praise!
 Increased in style, we well may call
 Thee now the whole world's admiral,
 Whilst mighty Charles with trident stands,
 And like some God the sea commands.
 Having so gloriously o'ercome,
 What now remains but to come home,
 And, fixed in our British sphere,
 Shine a bright constellation there?
 More famous and more great than ere
 Cæsar or Alexander were!

It will be noted that these verses likewise correspond to Dryden's criticism, and that a comparison of them with Wild's bears out the remark as to "the other extremity of poetry". Dryden draws a further contrast in the matter of their education. Wild was a dissenting clergyman, who had little chance of the "advantage of converse", and, though of considerable attainments, was of that rough originality which seems to disprove the "advantage of education". On the other hand, Flecknoe, who was a priest, had travelled widely, and, as he tells us, had studied abroad; and we have unimpeachable evidence that he enjoyed to the full the "advantage of converse". He dedicated a volume of *Epigrams* (1670) "to all his noble friends", explaining that "to dedicate them to any one in particular were to do injury to the rest"; and Langbaine, his contemporary, states that "his acquaintance with the nobility was more than with the Muses" (*Account of the English Dramatic Poets*, 1691, p. 199). It is possible that Dryden had seen the verses of Wild and Flecknoe on the defeat of the Dutch, and that his prophecy was *ex post facto*.

page 4, l. 2. clench, or *clinch*, the common expression at this time for a pun or quibble. Cf. p. 51, l. 34.

l. 4. *Clevelandism*. A criticism of the style of John Cleveland, or Cleiveland (1613-1658) occurs further on (p. 24). His daring fancy and far-fetched conceits made his name synonymous with extravagance of style.

l. 8. he intends at least to spare. The first edition reads "he spares".

l. 25. ten little words. This remark apparently suggested Pope's couplet in the *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 346, 347:

While expletives their feeble aid do join,
And ten low words oft creep in one dull line.

l. 32. Martial, *Epigrams*, viii. 19.

page 5, l. 17. Withers. George Wither (1588-1667) had written his best work by about 1622, the date of the publication of his *Philarete*; but unfortunately he continued writing during the rest of his long life, and was unable to attain again to his early excellence. The Restoration critics knew him by his later doggerel, and were ignorant of his exquisite lyrics (e.g. "Shall I, wasting in despair") and the beauties of his *Philarete* and *Shepherd's Hunting*. He became the more ready a butt for the Royalist wits as he had taken the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. Pope calls him "wretched Withers", and numbers him among "the dull of ancient days" (*Dunciad* i. 296); and even Scott's note on him is only that he was "a voluminous author of the reign of Charles I". But his name began to be recognised about Scott's time, since when he has been known by his correct name, Wither, not Withers.

Oldham, in his *Satires upon the Jesuits* (1670), compares the names of Wild and Wither: "very spite", he says, "shall make the arrantest Wild or Withers write".

l. 23. candles' ends. This was an old form of auction; a small piece of candle was lit at the beginning of an auction and the last bid before the candle went out was accepted. The method was adopted from France. It was practised at Reading, in Berkshire, as late as 1899, according to the *Reading Mercury*, 16th Dec. 1899; cf. *Notes and Queries*, 6th ser. vol. xi, pp. 276 and 371. There are two references to sales in Pepys's *Diary*, 6th Nov. 1660, and there are numerous advertisements of them in the *Evening Post* and *Spectators*.

l. 30. Qui Bavium, &c. Virgil, *Eclogues*, iii. 90.

l. 34. Nam quos contemnimus, &c. Author not found.
page 6, l. 5. Petronius, *Satyricon*, ii.

l. 21. Indignor quidquam, &c. Horace, *Epistles*, ii. 1. 76, 77.

l. 24. Si meliora dies. *Ib.* 34, 35.

page 7, l. 5. that if. The first edition reads "that he approved his proposals, and if".

ll. 6-9. Though Crites represents Sir Robert Howard, and though most of his arguments throughout the *Essay* are taken directly from the preface to *Four New Plays*, he is here made to maintain what he had denied in his real character. Far from contending that the ancients were superior to the moderns in dramatic poetry, he had argued that "our English plays justly challenge the pre-eminence". But he had declared for the superiority of the drama of 'the last age'.

l. 25. Sir John Suckling (1609-1642), referred to again, p. 52. He was an ardent Royalist, and the "courtliness" of the cavalier found expression in his lyrics. His best-known piece is the *Ballad upon a Wedding*. He wrote also four plays, but he owes nothing of his reputation to them. One of them, *Aglaure*, has two fifth acts, so that it might be ended as either a tragedy or tragi-comedy—an example followed by Sir Robert Howard in his *Vestal Virgin*. But he has more in common with Buckhurst and Sedley, who may be considered his successors in lyrical poetry.

ll. 26, 27. Edmund Waller (1606-1687) ... Sir John Denham (1615-1669). Dryden had referred more particularly to these two poets in the preface to the *Rival Ladies*: "The excellence and dignity of it [*rhyme*] were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it. He first made writing easily an art, first showed us to conclude the sense most commonly in distichs, which in the verse of those before him runs on for so many lines together, that the reader is out of breath to overtake it. This sweetness of Mr. Waller's lyric poesy was afterwards followed in the epic by Sir John Denham in his *Cooper's Hill*, a poem which . . . for the majesty of the style is, and ever will be, the exact standard of good writing." Though Waller's reputation as a poet now rests chiefly on such lyrics as "Go, lovely Rose," and "On a Girdle", his importance in the history of English poetry lies in his being the first to mould the heroic couplet in the form which Dryden and Pope were to

page 9, l. 9. Thespis (flor. B.C. 536) was the inventor only of tragedy. Susarion, the first comedian we know of, was earlier than Thespis, but comedy was later than tragedy in becoming an accredited literary form.

ll. 11, &c. It has been observed of arts and sciences, &c. Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana*, i. 16, 17.

l. 18. these last hundred years, the age of Bacon and Descartes, Kepler and Galileo. Sir Isaac Newton's scientific career began about 1665.

page 10, l. 2. Lycophron (flor. B.C. 280-250) was the chief tragic poet of the Alexandrian school. The number of his tragedies is variously stated at forty-six and sixty-four; but they are now all lost, with the exception of four lines.

ll. 8, &c. Alit æmulatio, &c. Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana*, i. 17.

ll. 21, &c. This passage on the imitation of the ancients may be compared with Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 88-140. The more important lines are:—

Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodised (88, 89);
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same (135).
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem,
To copy Nature is to copy them (139, 140).

page 11, ll. 7-11. Aristotle's *Poetics* begins by proposing "to treat of Poetry in itself and of its various kinds, noting the essential quality of each"; but the fragment which has come down to us treats only of tragedy and of the difference between tragic and epic poetry in general. The opening words of chapter vi are: "Of the poetry which imitates in hexameter verse (*i.e.* the Epic), and of Comedy, we shall speak hereafter". (Professor Butcher's translation.)

ll. 12, &c. The rules of the three unities were, generally, that there should be only one *action* in a play, that the *time* of the action should not exceed one day, and that the *place* of the action should not be varied. Horace's *Art of Poetry* had no influence whatever on the establishment of these unities. Nor were they "extracted" from Aristotle's *Poetics*, though they were deduced from it. Aristotle enforces the unity of action, but says nothing about the unity of place, and as to the unity of time merely states that "tragedy endeavours as far as possible to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly

to exceed this limit" (ch. v). This mere statement was turned by the sixteenth and seventeenth century critics into a rigid rule; and the logical outcome was the addition of the unity of place. It will be noted that Dryden says *Des Trois Unités* instead of *Les Trois Unités*. He had studied closely, as the *Essay* shows, Corneille's *Discours des Trois Unités*, and probably, by a slight oversight, he used without change the last three words of this title.

l. 28. (as near as may be), not in the first edition.

page 12, l. 25. Painted scenes were first used in the regular theatre in Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes*. See note on p. 69, l. 4. They had been used before this in masques.

page 13, l. 11. Corneille, spelled *Cornel* in the first edition.

la liaison des scènes. Corneille discusses this in his *Discours des Trois Unités* (ed. Louandre, ii. 383) and in the *Examen of La Suivante*.

l. 28. Johnson. This was the usual spelling of the dramatist's name in Dryden's time, as also in Addison's. The better form *Jonson* was not generally adopted till this century. Both forms were used in Jonson's lifetime.

l. 29. The Discoveries (with the alternative titles of *Timber*, *Explorata*, and *Sylva*) appeared posthumously in 1641. The passage referred to is the third last section. Jonson sums up his argument thus. "For as a house, consisting of divers materials, becomes one structure and one dwelling, so an action, composed of divers parts, may become one fable, epic or dramatic".

page 14, ll. 1-6. The whole sentence is translated from Corneille's *Discours des Trois Unités*. "Il n'y doit avoir qu'une action complète, qui laisse l'esprit de l'auditeur dans le calme; mais elle ne peut le devenir que par plusieurs autres imparfaites qui lui servent d'acheminement, et tiennent cet auditeur dans une agréable suspension".

l. 24. the half-Menander. See Suetonius, *Vita Terentii*: "Item C. Cæsar: Tu quoque, tu in summis, o dimidiata Menander," &c.

l. 28. Aristophanes and Plautus. The first edition reads "Aristophanes in the old comedy and Plautus in the new".

page 15, l. 5. Macrobius (flor. c. 400 A.D.) discusses Virgil in his *Conviviorum Saturnaliorum Libri Septem*. "The third,"

fourth, fifth, and sixth books are devoted to Virgil, dwelling respectively on his learning in religious matters, his rhetorical skill, his debt to Homer (with a comparison of the art of the two) and to other Greek writers, and the nature and extent of his borrowings from the earlier Latin poets" (*Encyc. Brit.*).

ll. 14, 15. Ben Jonson translated Horace's *Ars Poetica*. In his *Discoveries* he says that the poet "must read many, but ever the best and choicest; those that can teach him anything he must ever account his masters, and reverence: among whom Horace and he that taught him, Aristotle, deserved to be the first in estimation".

l. 23. You, Eugenius, prefer him, &c. Cf. p. 51, ll. 11-14. Buckhurst showed his great admiration of Jonson in the epilogue he wrote for the revival of *Every Man in his Humour* about this time (printed in a "Collection of Poems", 1673). Malone refers to a high eulogy on Jonson by Buckhurst written about 1668, and to be found in Dryden's *Miscellanies*, v. 123, edit. 1716. Buckhurst's admiration of Jonson was hereditary: his father, the fifth Earl of Dorset, had, while still Lord Buckhurst, contributed an elegy to *Jonsonus Virbius* (1638).

page 16, l. 30. Paternulus, *Historia Romana*, ii. 92.

page 17, ll. 10, &c. Dryden makes a curious mistake in saying it is Aristotle who divides the integral parts of a play into the Protasis, Epitasis, Catastasis, and Catastrophe. Aristotle says that "every tragedy falls into two parts, Complication and Unravelling or *Dénouement*" (ch. xviii), and divides its external characteristics into "Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Scenery, and Song" (ch. vi); while in a chapter of doubtful authenticity, the quantitative parts are given as "Prologue, Episode, Exodos, and Choric Song" (ch. xii). The division here attributed to Aristotle was made by Julius Cæsar Scaliger (1484-1558) in his *Libri Poeticæ Septem*, published posthumously in 1561. The passage is so important—and so difficult of access—that it may be quoted in the original in full: "Partes legitimæ sunt, sine quibus nequit fabula constare, quibusque contentam esse oportet. Protasis est, in qua proponitur et narratur summa rei sine declaratione exitus; ita enim argutior est, animum semper auditoris suspensum habens ad expectationem. Si enim prædicatur exitus, frigidiuscula fit. Tametsi ex argumento omnem rem tenes: tamen adeo expedita ac brevis est indicatio, ut non tam saturet animum quam incendat. Epitasis, in qua turbæ

aut excitantur, aut intenduntur. Catastasis est vigor ac status fabulae, in qua res miscetur in ea fortunae tempestate, in quam subducta est. Hanc partem multi non animadvertere; necessaria tamen est. Catastrophe, conversio negotii exagitati in tranquillitatem non expectatam. His partibus additus, uti dicebamus, Prologus," &c. (Book i, *Historicus*, ch. 9) This division, however, as is incidentally implied, is not entirely Scaliger's own. It is founded on a division made by Aelius Donatus (flor. 350 A.D.) in his commentary on Terence, viz. "Comoedia per quatuor partes dividitur, Prologum, Protasin, Epitasin, Catastrophem"; and again: "Protasis est primus actus fabulae, quo pars argumenti explicatur, pars reticetur ad populi expectationem tenendam. Epitasis, involutio argumenti, cuius elegantia connectitur. Catastrophe, explicatio fabulae, per quam summa res consummatur." The *Catastasis* was Scaliger's

the catastrophe; and that the epitasis, as we are taught, and the catastasis, had been intervening parts, to have been expected."

ll. 17-19. The first edition reads simply: "Thirdly the *Catastasis* or counter-turn, which destroys", &c.

l. 26. λύσις, literally the 'untying' or 'unravelling', opposed to δέσις, the 'tying' or 'complication'. See Aristotle's *Poetics*, ch. xviii. The first edition of the *Essay* had the obvious mistake of δέσις instead of λύσις, both here and in Neander's speech, p. 58.

dénouement, literally the 'unknotting', opposed to *nœud*. Cf. Boileau, *Art poétique*, iii 406:

Que son nœud bien formé se dénoue aisément.

page 18, l. 4. The correct quotation is

Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu,

Ars Poetica, 189. Horace gives this as a rule, not merely for comedy but for plays in general. "What poet first limited to five the number of the acts" is still an open question. The division of the plays of the Roman comic dramatists into five acts is due entirely to their commentators, who probably followed Horace's rule. See *The Epistles of Horace*, ed. Wilkins, pp. 370, 371.

ll. 10, &c. The division of Spanish plays into three acts was due chiefly to Lope de Vega (1562-1635). "Before his time Spanish play-writers had hesitated between the classic division into five acts and a tentative division into four. One early and forgotten writer, Avendaño, took three. Lope, not without the co-operation of others, but mainly by his example, established this last as the recognized number of *jornadas*—acts—for a Spanish play. The choice was made for a definite reason. In the *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias*—a verse epistle written to a friend who had asked him to justify his works before the critics who held by the classic rules—Lope laid it down that the first act should introduce the characters and knit the intrigue; the second lead to the crisis, the *scène à faire* of French dramatic critics; and the third wind all up." (Mr. David Hannay, *Later Renaissance*, p. 77.) *Jornada* means literally day's work, day's journey, &c. Cf. Ticknor, *History of Spanish Literature*, (1863), I, p. 267 n. and II, p. 64.

l. 19. τὸ μῦθος, a mistake for ὁ μῦθος.

l. 20. τῶν πραγμάτων σύνθεσις, 'the arrangement of the incidents'. See the *Poetics*, ch. vi, vii, &c.

l. 22. a late writer. This is probably Sir Robert Howard. In his preface to *Four New Plays* (1665) he says, after stating the general characteristics of the classic and French drama, "It is first necessary to consider why probably the compositions of the Ancients, especially in their serious plays, were after this manner; and it will be found that the subjects they commonly chose drove them upon the necessity, which were usually the most known stories and fables", &c.

l. 27. Greeklings. "Which of the Greeklings durst ever give precepts to Demosthenes?" Ben Jonson, *Discoveries*.

page 19, l. 4. good cheap, on advantageous terms, easily. *Cheap* (connected with German *kauf*) originally meant 'bar-gaining, bartering'; hence 'market', as in *Cheapside*. *Good cheap* is a state of the market favourable for buyers, not for sellers, and is thus synonymous with 'low prices'. The forms *better cheap* and *best cheap* also occur, and even *dear cheap* (i.e. high prices). Cf. French *bon marché*. The modern adjective has its origin in the phrase 'good cheap'.

ll. 7-9. Eugenius forgets the 'tragic irony' of the ancient dramatists, and of Sophocles in particular. Whatever the knowledge of the audience, the *dramatis personæ* at least are

er fate, and are made to utter remarks into whose significance can be read than they are aware. The most deliberate instances of tragic irony in our literature can be found in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, which is a model of the ancients; but tragic irony also occurs in Shakespearian tragedy, notably in *Othello*.

Lucina, &c. Cf. Terence, *Andria*, lili. i. 15, 4. 41.

3, &c. the unity of place. See note on p. 11. I am right in saying that the unity of place is not Aristotle or Horace, but he is wrong in saying that the mention of it "till in our age the French poets received the precept of the stage", i.e. about 1636. In fact, after 1580, Sir Philip Sidney had criticised *Laodamia* as "faulty both in place and time" (1595); and Ben Jonson, in the *Man in his Humour*, had condemned the "brus wafis you o'er the seas" and scenes are countries. Sidney took many of his arguments from the three unities—though by his time they were regarded as dramatic rules—from the Italian translation of *Poetics* by Castelvetro (1570); and it is this translation the earliest statement yet discovered of the three unities. The formal establishment of the three unities was due to Jean Chapelain (1595-1674). The date about 1636—the date cannot be definitely fixed—when he propounded the three unities to Cardinal Richelieu, whom they were absolutely new, and who was the authority, which was as authoritative in literature as in politics, to impose them on the French drama. But Chapelain's part in the establishment of the three unities, and whether or not he was the first to do so definitely, they had already been discussed, and were slowly taking shape, in the works of the Italian critics, and with these Chapelain was doubtless familiar. He refers to Castelvetro frequently in his letters.

4, says Scaliger, &c. This is the punctuation of the sentence. In the first edition the sentence ran: "Scaliger, the two first acts concluding the first night, the three last on the ensuing

Scaliger advanced this theory in his *Poetics*, Book vi, *Hypercriticus*, iii.

l. 24. one of his tragedies, the *Suppliants*. This illustration, as Dryden admits (p. 21, l. 4), is borrowed from Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*: "Euripide, dans les *Suppliantes*, fait partir Thésée d'Athènes avec une armée, donner une bataille devant les murs de Thèbes, qui en étaient éloignés de douze ou quinze lieues, et revenir victorieux en l'acte suivant; et depuis qu'il est parti jusqu'à l'arrivée du messager qui vient faire le récit de sa victoire, Aethra et le chœur n'ont que trente-six vers à dire. C'est assez bien employer un temps si court." Scaliger makes a similar allusion in his *Poetics*, Book iii, *Idea*, xcvi.

page 21, l. 1. disorders. The first edition read *garboils*, which, as the change implies, was now falling out of use.

l. 22. Antipho. Corneille had pointed this out in his *Discours des Trois Unités*; but there does not seem to be any precedent in Corneille for the ensuing illustrations from Terence.

page 22, l. 17. The story of Medea was a favourite subject of the Greek and Latin dramatists, but the *Medea* of Euripides and of Seneca are alone extant. Dryden alludes to the former.

l. 31. Euripides "meddled with comedy" in the satyr-drama of the *Cyclops*.

l. 32. the sock and buskin, the symbols of comedy and tragedy, corresponding to the Latin *soccus* and *cothurnus*. Cf. Jonson's poem *To the Memory of Shakespeare*—

to hear thy buskin tread,

And shake a stage; or, when thy socks were on, &c.;

and Milton's *Allegro*, l. 132, "If Jonson's learned sock be on".

page 23, ll. 16, &c. Tandem ego, &c. Terence, *Eunuchus*, ii. 1. 17-18.

ll. 27, &c. Sed proavi, &c. *Ars Poetica*, 270-272.

ll. 33, &c. Multa renascentur, &c. *Ars Poetica*, 70-72.

page 24, l. 2. Cleveland. See p. 4, where the term 'catachresis' is explained.

l. 6. Mistake, &c. *Eclogues*, iv. 20.

ll. 8, &c. Mirantur, &c. *Aeneid*, viii. (not vii.) 91-93.

ll. 13, 14. Si verbo, &c. *Metamorphoses*, i. 175, 176.

l. 17. Et longas, &c. *Metamorphoses*, i. 561.

l. 30. Donne (1573-1631) His "rough cadence" is most noticeable in his *Satires*, where it was probably more or less deliberate, in imitation of Persius. Ben Jonson, in his *Conversations with Drummond*, said that Donne was "the first poet in the world in some things" (§ 7), but that he "for not keeping of accent deserved hanging" (§ 3).

page 25, ll. 3, 4. Had Cain been Scot, &c. Cleveland's *Rebel Scot*, ll. 63, 64.

l. 5. Si sic, &c. Juvenal, *Satires*, x. 123, 124.

ll. 8, 9 For beauty, &c. Cleveland's *Rupertismus*, ll. 39, 40. *White powder* is arsenic.

l. 25 Medea. Only one line of Ovid's *Medea* has been preserved, and by Quintilian, viii. 5, viz. "Servare potui. Perdere an possim rogas?" Dr. Johnson criticises this passage in his *Life of Dryden*: "In his Dialogue on the Drama, he pronounces with great confidence that the Latin tragedy of *Medea* is not Ovid's, because it is not sufficiently interesting and pathetic. He might have determined the question upon surer evidence; for it is quoted by Quintilian as the work of Seneca, and the only line which remains of Ovid's play, for one line is left us, is not there to be found. There was therefore no need of the gravity of conjecture, or the discussion of plot or sentiment, to find what was already known upon higher authority than such discussions can ever reach."

l. 28. Omne genus, &c. *Tristia*, ii. 381.

l. 31. the story of Myrrha, *Metamorphoses*, x, of Caunus and Biblis, Id. ix. The story of Myrrha was translated by Dryden.

page 26, l. 7. love-scenes, &c. On this point see Prof. Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1898), p. 266

l. 21. Juvenal, *Satires*, vi. 195. After "kindness", the first edition reads, "then indeed to speak sense were an offence".

page 27, l. 9. French romances. The chief of these are Honoré D'Urfé's *Astrée*, La Calprenède's *Cassandra*, *Cléopâtre*, and *Pharamond*, and Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*. They were very popular in England about this time, and several of them were translated. Their most notable characteristic after that mentioned by Dryden is their inordinate length. On an average they run to about ten volumes.

l. 13. Sum pius Æneas, &c. *Æneid*, i. 378, 379: made up of two lines.

l. 24. Si foret, &c. Horace, *Satires*, i. 10. 68.

l. 31. quos Libitina sacravit. Cf. Horace, *Epistles*, ii. 1. 49. page 28, l. 26. so long together bad Englishmen, a Royalist allusion to the Civil Wars.

l. 27. Beaumont died in 1616, Fletcher in 1625, and Jonson in 1637.

page 29, ll. 1, 2. The 'reform' in the French drama was the introduction of the rules of the three unities. See note on p. 20, l. 13, &c., for the part played by Richelieu in this reform. It should be noted, however, that the French drama was of itself coming into line with the three unities when they were formally imposed by Richelieu, and that his real work consisted in hastening an inevitable change by expressing in a rigid formula the growing tendency of the drama. The "other Frenchmen" of whom Lisideius speaks are doubtless the four authors who, along with Corneille, had Richelieu for their patron, and helped him in his dramatic ambitions. He gave them their subjects and indicated the method of treatment, and he occasionally wrote himself. Corneille soon found this domination irksome, and withdrew from the company of the *cinq auteurs*. Shortly afterwards he wrote the *Cid* (1636). It did not conform strictly to the three unities, and Richelieu referred it to the judgment of the newly-founded Academy, with a view to enforcing the new rules. The result was that after the Academy had delivered their *Sentiments sur le Cid* (which was largely the work of Chapelain) the rules of the three unities in the French drama were undisputed till the romantic revival early in the nineteenth century.

ll. 10, &c. Cf. Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*: "Ces paroles" (of Aristotle) "donnent lieu à cette dispute fameuse, si elles doivent être entendues d'un jour naturel de vingt-quatre heures, ou d'un jour artificiel de douze; ce sont deux opinions dont chacune a des partisans considérables: et, pour moi, je trouve qu'il y a des sujets si malaisés à renfermer en si peu de temps, que non-seulement je leur accorderais les vingt-quatre heures entières, mais je me servirais même de la licence que donne ce philosophe de les excéder un peu, et les pousserais sans scrupule jusqu'à trente." D'Aubignac, in his *Pratique du Théâtre* (1657), ii. 7, held for a day of twelve hours; and La

Mesnardière, in his *Poétique* (1640), ch. 5, followed Scaliger in recommending the identification of the time of the action with the time of the representation, though willing to allow a day of twenty-four hours and even, in special circumstances, "a little more".

l. 35. Montagues and Capulets. See *Romeo and Juliet*.

page 30, ll. 4, &c. *tragi-comedy* ..our own invention The French drama is rich in "tragi-comédies", but the French *tragi-comedy* is not, as is the "drama of our own invention", a mixture of tragedy and comedy, but rather a serious play which ends happily. Sir Philip Sidney had condemned "mongrel *tragi-comedy*" in his *Apologie for Poetrie* (ed. Shuckburgh, p. 54); and Milton, in his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, had spoken of "the poet's error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons". Sir Robert Howard declares against *tragi-comedies* in his preface to *Four New Plays*. Cf. Addison, *Spectator*, No. 40. In the preface to *Don Sebastian* (1690), Dryden defends *tragi-comedy* on the ground of popularity; see Introduction.

l. 14. The Red Bull, at the upper end of St John Street, was a theatre of the lowest class. It was opened late in the reign of Elizabeth, and demolished shortly after the Restoration. (See Collier's *Annals of the Stage* (ed. 1879), iii. 132-135.)

l. 15. *Atque ursum*, &c. Horace, *Epistles*, ii. 1. 185, 186: the correct quotation is—

media inter carmina poscunt

Aut ursum aut pugiles.

l. 17. According to Aristotle (*Poetics*, vi) tragedy should arouse the emotions only of pity and fear (i.e. compassion and concernment). The addition of *admiration* was made by the sixteenth and seventeenth century critics. Thus Sir Philip Sidney speaks of "high and excellent tragedy . . . that with stirring the affects of admiration [i.e. wonder] and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of the world" (*Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. Shuckburgh, p. 31), and Boileau praises Corneille for having gone beyond the rules of Aristotle in endeavouring to excite admiration (Letter to Ch. Perrault, 1700). Addison says "terror, pity, or admiration" in the *Spectator*, No. 42.

l. 31. *Ex noto fictum*, &c. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 240.

l. 33. as was observed before, p. 18.

page 31, ll. 4, 5. Atque ita mentitur, &c. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 151, 152.

l. 10. success, issue. Cf. Dedication, p. xxiv, l. 27.

l. 14. Justinus, i. 8, ii. 3, and xxxvii. 3; Xenophon, *Cyropædia*, viii. 7. Xenophon's account has little claim to be considered trustworthy. The "some others" who say that Cyrus died a violent death include Herodotus, who is the most trustworthy in this matter as having lived nearest the time of Cyrus.

l. 26. Cf. the Prologue to *Henry V*:

For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass.

l. 34. Quodcunque, &c. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 188.

page 32, l. 3. τὰ ἔνυμα, the truth; ἐρύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, the likeness of truth: Hesiod, *Theogony*, 27. Cf. *Odyssey*, xix. 203.

l. 9. one whole and great action, probably a recollection of Aristotle's definition of tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude", &c. (*Poetics*, chap. vi).

l. 18. which we have acknowledged, in the definition of a play, p. 8.

ll. 20-22. There is record of two or three Restoration adaptations from the plays of Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600-1681). The best-known is the *Adventures of Five Hours* (referred to on pp. 41 and 55), a tragi-comedy by Sir Samuel Tuke, derived from Calderon's *Escondido y la Tapada*. The first edition appeared in 1663, and there were several reprints. George Digby, second Earl of Bristol, gave versions of *Mejor esta que estaba* and *Peor esta que estaba* in *'Tis better than it was* and *Worse and Worse*, acted between 1662 and 1665, but now lost (see Downes, *Roscus Anglicanus*, 1789, p. 36); while his *Elwira, or the worst not always true* (1667), is said to be derived from Calderon's *No siempre lo Peor es Cierto* (see Ticknor, *Spanish Literature*, ii, p. 392 n.; but cf. *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, art. George Digby). The anonymous *Two Noble Ladies and the converted Nonjuror*, which was acted at the Red Bull, and therefore dates from shortly after the Restoration, is likewise said to be derived

from Calderon (see Hazlitt's *Manual of Old English Plays*, 1892, p. 241) These appear to be the only adaptations from Calderon before 1668 of which any record is preserved. Dryden's *Mock Astrologer*, which appeared shortly after the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, is ultimately derived from Calderon's *Astrologo Fingido*, but it was taken from Thomas Corneille's French version (*Le feint Astrologue*) of the Spanish play.

L. 25. Rollo, Duke of Normandy, is the sub-title of the *Bloody Brother* (published 1639), usually ascribed to Fletcher; but its authorship is uncertain, a plausible view being that it was written in the first instance by Fletcher and Jonson, and revised at a later date by Massinger (*Dict. Nat. Biog.*). The plot is taken from the fourth book of Herodian's contemporary Greek history of the period 180 to 238 A.D., but the circumstances and the characters are altered to Norman times.

page 33, l. 1. oleo, or *olio*, mixture, medley. From Spanish *olla* (pronounced *olya*) in *olla podrida*, a mixed dish of meats and vegetables: L. *olla*, a pot. The form *oglio* also occurs.

L. 3. Golias, a comic personage of mediæval literature. The satires issued under the name of Golias (e.g. *Confessio Goliae*) are commonly attributed to Walter Map or Mapes. The first and second editions read "Golia's", the third "Goliath's".

L. 14. an ingenious person of our nation, unidentified.

page 34, l. 4. protatic persons are those who appear at the beginning of a play to give certain necessary information, but have themselves no bearing on the plot. Dryden borrows the name from Corneille, *Discours du Poème Dramatique*: "Térence, pour ouvrir son sujet, a introduit une nouvelle sorte de personnages, qu'on a appelés protatiques, parce qu'ils ne paraissent que dans la protase, où se doit faire la proposition et l'ouverture du sujet". The phrase seems to have been first used by Donatus in his preface to Terence's *Andria*: "Persona

in the prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* see quotation in note to p. 47, l. 5. So too had Sidney in his *Apologie for Poetrie*: "in the meantime two armies flye in, represented with foure swords and bucklers, and then what

nde heart will not receive it for a pitched fildes?" (ed. Luckburgh, p. 52).

page 36, ll. 8, 9. This objection was made by Sir Robert Howard in his preface to *Four New Plays*. Horace, he says, directly declares his judgment that everything makes more impression presented than related. Nor indeed can any one rationally assert the contrary. For if they affirm otherwise, they do by consequence maintain that a whole play might be as well related as acted."

l. 11. Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*: "C'est ce qui me donne lieu de remarquer que le poète n'est pas tenu d'exposer à la vue toutes les actions particulières qui amènent la principale: il doit choisir celles qui lui sont les plus avantageuses à faire voir, soit par la beauté du spectacle, soit par le clat et la véhémence des passions qu'elles produisent, soit par quelque autre agrément qui leur soit attaché, et cacher les autres derrière la scène, pour les faire connaître au spectateur, soit par une narration, ou par quelque autre adresse de l'art".

ll. 29, &c. Segnius irritant, &c. *Ars Poetica*, 180-187. Dryden's ensuing remark on "impossibility" and "unbelief" (p. 37) is a paraphrase of the line in the *Ars Poetica* immediately following his quotation: "Quodcunque ostendis illi sic incredulus odi". These lines of Horace formed the basis of the numerous seventeenth-century statements on dramatic narrations. Cf. Boileau, *Art poétique*, iii. 47-54.

page 37, l. 27. A King and no King (produced 1611, published 1619) was the joint work of Beaumont and Fletcher.

page 38, ll. 6, &c. conversion. Here again Dryden translates from Corneille's *Discours des Trois Unités*: "Il n'y a pas grand artifice à finir un poème quand celui qui a fait obstacle au dessein des premiers acteurs, durant quatre actes, en désiste au cinquième, sans aucun événement notable qui l'oblige".

l. 16. The Scornful Lady (produced after 1609, published 1616), likewise the joint work of Beaumont and Fletcher.

page 39, l. 6. Corneille, *Discours des Trois Unités*: "Il faut, il se peut, y rendre raison de l'entrée et de la sortie de chaque acteur; surtout pour la sortie, je tiens cette règle indispensable, il n'y a rien de si mauvaise grâce qu'un acteur qui se retire du théâtre seulement parce qu'il n'a plus de vers à dire". Corneille argues to the same effect in his *Discours du Poème dramatique*.

ll. 8, &c. rhyme.. partly received by us. See note on Dedication, p. xxiv, l. 19.

L. 22. an ancient author, Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana*, i. 17.

page 40, ll. 20-25. This translation of Corneille's *Menteur* (1642) was first acted about 1661. It was published in 1685 under the title *The Mistaken Beauty, or the Liar*; but there seems to have been an earlier edition in 1661 under the latter title only. (See Genest's *English Stage*, i, p. 34.) The translation was anonymous. The first edition of the *Essay* has "acted to so much advantage by Mr. Hart"—i.e. Charles Hart (d. 1683), a leading actor of the Restoration stage.

ll. 28, &c. See Corneille's *Discours du Poème Dramatique* (ed. Louandre, ii, p. 324).

l. 34. Molière. The first edition had the erroneous form "de Molière" (1622-1673).

the younger Corneille, Thomas Corneille (1625-1709), brother of Pierre (1606-1684). His best-known plays appeared after Dryden's *Essay*.

L. 35. Quinault (1635-1688) was for about ten years the most popular dramatist in France, but about 1670 the advent of Racine led him to abandon the regular drama for the operalibretto, on which his reputation now rests.

Any change that Dryden could note in the French drama was certainly not due to imitation of the English stage. However well the Restoration poets knew French literature, this interest was not reciprocated. There is no evidence that Boileau, their great critic, ever heard of Shakespeare.

page 41, l. 4. Richelieu died in 1642. See note on p. 20, ll. 13, &c., and p. 29, ll. 1, 2.

l. 7. Many of the plays of the younger Corneille, for example, had a Spanish source. As to the English drama, several of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher were derived from the

Gallant and Rival Ladies were borrowed from the Spanish.

L. 10. the Adventures. See note on p. 32, ll. 20-22. Diego is a character in Tuke's play.

page 42, l. 29. The primum mobile, or 'first mover' (l. 34),

was the tenth and outermost sphere in the Ptolemaic system of astronomy.

page 43, l. 3. Eugenius, apparently a mistake for 'Crites'. See p. 14, ll. 1-6.

l. 10. co-ordination, want of subordination, the different actions or parts being equally important.

ll. 30-32. Cinna, *ou La Clémence d'Auguste* (1630), *La Mort de Pompée* (1643 or 1644), and *Polyeucte, Martyr (tragédie chrétienne)*, 1642 or 1643) are all by Corneille.

l. 35. "The custom of placing an hour-glass before the clergyman was then common in England. It is still the furniture of a country pulpit in Scotland. A facetious preacher used to press his audience to take *another glass with him*" (note by Sir Walter Scott, 1808).

page 45, ll. 16, 17. *The Maid's Tragedy* (produced by 1611, published 1619) is by Beaumont and Fletcher; the other three are Ben Jonson's masterpieces, the last being better known by its other title, *Volpone*.

page 46, ll. 5-7. Cf. Addison, *Spectator*, No. 44: "Among all our methods of moving pity or terror, there is none so absurd and barbarous, and what more exposes us to the contempt and ridicule of our neighbours, than that dreadful butchering of one another, which is so very frequent upon the English stage". Addison goes on to state that "the French have refined too much upon Horace's rule, who never designed to banish all kinds of death from the stage".

ll. 9, &c. Cf. Dr. Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare*: "It is also that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramatic fable, in its materiality, was ever credible, or for a single moment was ever credited".

l. 17. Corneille's *Andromède* (1650) is founded on the story of Andromeda, as given in the fourth and fifth books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Perseus, the son of Jupiter and Danae (hence the son of an heathen god"), appears in the third act 'in the air on the steed Pegasus', and kills the sea monster sent by Neptune to devour Andromeda. More than half of the *amatis personæ* are gods and goddesses. The elaborate stage settings and the introduction of songs help to complete the resemblance to a "ballet or masque", and were likewise a cause of the play's popularity.

l. 24. *balette*, spelled *ballette* in the first and second editions.

page 47, l. 5. There can be little doubt that Dryden here refers to the Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), for this is the only passage in which Jonson may be considered to 'use extreme severity' on Shakespeare's non-observance of the 'decorum of the stage'. It enumerates several of the 'ill customs of the age', which Jonson refuses to follow in his comedy:

To make a child now swaddled, to proceed
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed,
Past threescore years; or, with three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot and half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars.
He rather prays you will be pleased to see
One such to-day as other plays should be;
Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas, &c.

But these customs were characteristic of the Elizabethan romantic drama in general, and, though instances of them occur in Shakespeare's plays, it has not been convincingly shown that Ben Jonson's criticism was directed against Shakespeare's plays in particular. The prologue was first printed in the folio of 1616, and those who hold that it has special reference to Shakespeare's *Histories* and *Winter's Tale* (1611), conclude that it was not written till about that date; but it has not been proved that the prologue did not accompany the earlier representations of the play. There is a similar taunt in the Induction to *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599). "How comes it then that in some one play we see so many seas, countries, and kingdoms passed over with such admirable dexterity?" Jonson criticised Shakespeare in his *Discoveries*, in the great section "De Shakespeare Nostrati", and he is there 'severe', not on the construction of his plays, but only on his style.

I. 14. In the original editions, "I hope, &c.", does not begin a new paragraph.

II. 23, &c. Corneille "Il est facile aux spéculatifs d'être sévères; mais s'ils voulaient donner dix ou douze poèmes de cette nature au public, ils élargiraient peut-être les règles encore plus que je ne fais, sitôt qu'ils auraient reconnu par l'expérience quelle contrainte apporte leur exactitude, et combien de belles choses elle bannit de notre théâtre.

page 48, l. 27. one of their newest plays. Identified by Mr. W. P. Ker (1900) as "Thomas Corneille's *L'Amour à la Mode* (1651), A. iii, not quite accurately remembered"; cf. Quinault's *L'Amant Indiscret* (A. ii, sc. 4).

page 49, ll. 22, 23. Corneille's series of masterpieces may be said to end with *Polyeucte*. The failure of *Pertharite* in 1653 led him to abandon the drama. "It is better", he said on this occasion, "to take my leave of my own free-will than to wait till it is definitely given me; it is right that after a career of twenty years I should begin to recognize that I am becoming too old to be longer fashionable." He returned to the drama in 1659 with *Œdipe*, but he did not equal his earlier plays, and the rise of Racine affected his popularity. During the interval between Corneille's supremacy and Racine's, Quinault was the favourite dramatist. (See note, p. 40, l. 35.)

l. 26. Note the loose syntax.

l. 33. our plots are weaved in English looms, but the material was frequently imported from France. Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-All* (1667), for instance, was adapted from Molière's *L'Étourdi*. (For a list of Restoration plays from the French see Ward's *English Dramatic Literature*, iii, 315, 6.)

page 50, ll. 5, 6. It is not the case that *all* the comedies before Shakespeare were "in verse of six feet", though this was a common measure. The number of accents is the only point which the French alexandrines have in common with the rude doggerel of such pieces as *Gammer Gurton's Needle*.

ll. 15, 16. Jonson praises the *Faithful Shepherdess* (produced by 1610) in his *Underwoods*, xiv.

l. 31. almost exactly formed, *i.e.* observed the three unities. In the *Merry Wives* the scene is laid in "Windsor and the neighbourhood", and the action is confined to two days.

page 51, l. 5. examen, critical dissertation, examination. The word occurs in English in this sense early in the seventeenth century, but its present use was probably suggested by Corneille's "examens" of his own plays.

ll. 11-14. Cf. p. 15, l. 23.

ll. 21, &c. "The account of Shakespeare", says Dr. Johnson "may stand as a perpetual model of encomiastic criticism; exact without minuteness, and lofty without exaggeration. The praise lavished by Longinus on the attestation of the heroes of Marathon by Demosthenes fades away before it.

In a few lines is exhibited a character so extensive in its comprehension, and so curious in its limitations, that nothing can be added, diminished, or reformed; nor can the editors and admirers of Shakespeare, in all their emulation of reverence, boast of much more than of having diffused and paraphrased this epitome of excellence, of having changed Dryden's gold for baser metal, of lower value though of greater bulk." The hesitation with which Dryden ventures to suggest that Shakespeare was Jonson's superior throws interesting light on the progress of Shakespeare's reputation. (Cf. the omission of Shakespeare's name, p. 28, ll. 27, 28.) In the *Defence of the Epilogue to the Conquest of Granada* (1672) Dryden takes up a different attitude, and enlarges on the faults which are hinted at in the present passage. "Shakespeare," he there says, "who many times has written better than any poet in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes in many places below the dullest writers of ours or any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such height of thought to so low expressions as he often does. He is the very Janus of poets. . . . Let us therefore admire the beauties and the heights of Shakespeare without falling after him into a carelessness, and, as I may call it, a lethargy of thought, for whole scenes together." But in this *Defence* Dryden had set himself to exalt the Restoration drama at the expense of the Elizabethan. The passage in the *Essay* may be taken as expressing his true opinion, for he had then no cause to plead. About the same time he made another fine eulogy on Shakespeare, in the Prologue to his and Davenant's adaptation of the *Tempest* (1667), in which he says that

Shakespeare's magic could not copied be,
Within that circle none durst walk but he.

page 52, l. 4. Quantum, &c. Virgil, *Eclogues*, i. 26.

L 5. John Hales (1584-1636), the "ever-memorable", became a fellow of Eton about 1613. His writings are theological or ecclesiastical, the chief of them being a tract on *Schism and Schismatics* (1636), but it is doubtful if they were designed for publication. Wood, the author of the *Athenæ Oxonienses*, refers to him as "a walking library". This anecdote about his admiration of Shakespeare is frequently quoted (e.g. by Charles Gildon in his *Reflections on Rymer's Short View*, 1694, and by Nicholas Rowe in the life prefixed to his edition of

Shakespeare, 1709), but there does not seem to be any earlier statement of it than Dryden's. (See Ingleby's *Centurie of Prayse*, 1879, pp. 198, 199.)

1. 17. Cf. Dryden's prologue to the *Tempest* (1667):

Shakespeare, who, taught by none, did first impart
To Fletcher wit.

1. 20. while he lived, *i.e.* Beaumont, died 1616.

11. 21, 22. There is no evidence that Ben Jonson submitted all his writings to Beaumont's censure. The story is merely "an idle tradition" (*Dict. Nat. Biog.*).

1. 24. the verses, &c. Jonson's *Epigrams*, 55:

How I do love thee, Beaumont, and thy Muse, &c.

Cf. Jonson's *Underwoods*, xiii.

1. 26. Philaster was produced not later than 1611; published 1620. The statement that it was the first play to bring Beaumont and Fletcher into esteem is also devoid of authority.

page 53, l. 1. Humour. See *infra*, p. 56.

1. 7. ornamental. The first edition reads "necessary".

11. 7-10. The Beaumont and Fletcher plays mentioned in this *Essay*—*The Bloody Brother* (or *Rollo*), *A King and no King*, *The Scornful Lady*, and *Philaster*—were all popular on the Restoration stage.

1. 34. Even Jonson's *Drink to me only with thine eyes* is a paraphrase from the Greek.

page 54, l. 11. in his comedies especially, the first edition reads "in his serious plays".

1. 24. Discoveries. Cf. p. 13, l. 29. Only the concluding sections deal with the drama; and though they afford abundant evidence of Jonson's erudition and keen intellect, they are of too casual and fragmentary a nature to be compared with studied treatises like Corneille's *Discours* and *Examens*.

1. 28. The Silent Woman, or *Epicæne*, appeared in 1609.

11. 31, 32. a natural day, twenty-four hours; an artificial one, twelve hours. Cf. the quotation from Corneille, note on p. 29, l. 10.

page 55, l. 3. Five Hours. See note on p. 32, ll. 20-22.

page 56, ll. 18, &c. humour. Jonson's theory of the

humours was founded on the hypothesis that a man's character was directly governed by physical conditions. His explanation of it, in the Induction to *Every Man out of his Humour*, shows it to be closely connected with the mediæval idea of four fluid temperaments:

In every human body
The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood,
By reason that they flow continually
In some one part and are not continent,
Receive the name of humours. Now, thus far
It may, by metaphor, apply itself
Unto the general disposition:
As when some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers
In their confluxions, all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour.

Hence he understood "humour" as the innate character or disposition of a person, apart from any adventitious habits or fashions. But every character reveals itself by outward signs, by what Dryden calls "some extravagant habit, passion, or affection, particular to some one person, by the oddness of which he is immediately distinguished from the rest of men", and it was by the description of such external idiosyncrasies that Jonson portrayed the inner character. This method arose from his *dramatis personæ* being generally the incarnation of abstract qualities; they are fixed types rather than characters in the process of development, as Shakespeare's are. In humour in its modern sense Jonson is not so rich

l. 20. τὸ γελοῖον, 'the ludicrous' see Aristotle's *Poetics*, v

the old comedy (470-390 B.C.), as distinct from the 'middle' (390-320 B.C.) and 'new' (320-250 B.C.) comedy of Greece.

l. 24. Socrates, in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes. The present passage seems to owe something to the section on 'the parts of a comedy and tragedy' in Jonson's *Discoveries*

l. 32. ἥθος, character, πάθος, emotion. By the former are meant "the characteristic moral qualities, the permanent dispositions of the mind, which reveal a certain condition of the will": by the latter, "the more transient emotions, the passing moods of feeling". (Prof. Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory*, 1898, p. 123.)

page 57, l. 4. Ex homine, &c. Terence, *Eunuchus*, l. 460.

l. 6. *humeur*. Dryden would seem to give the French word the specialized Jonsonian sense.

l. 35. True-Wit. Dryden says, in the *Defence of the Epilogue to the Conquest of Granada*, that True-Wit was Jonson's "masterpiece".

page 58, l. 3. *λύσις*. See note on p. 17, l. 26.

ll. 21-23. Horace, *Epistles*, ii. 1. 168-170.

l. 27. Corneille, *Discours des trois unités*: "Je ne puis oublier que c'est un grand ornement pour un poème que le choix d'un jour illustre et attendu depuis quelque temps. Il ne s'en présente pas toujours des occasions; et, dans tout ce que j'ai fait jusqu'ici, vous n'en trouverez de cette nature que quatre: celui d'*Horace*, . . . celui de *Rodogune*, d'*Andromède*, et de *Don Sanche*."

Note that Dryden by mistake says *thrice*.

page 60, l. 1. chess-player. The first and second editions read *chest-player*, an old form, extinct about this time.

l. 6. Molière's first five-act play in prose was *Don Juan* (1665). Before this he had used prose in the one-act *Précieuses ridicules* (1659) and *Impromptu de Versailles* (1663).

ll. 13-19. Cf. p. 28, ll. 32, 33. Dryden's remark is plainly prejudiced. Whether or not the Muses, "who ever follow peace", returned at the Restoration, the Commonwealth men were certainly not "enemies of all good learning", though they forbade the drama.

l. 26. these seven years. It would seem that the present passage was written, or revised, in 1667.

ll. 32, 33. Ubi plura, &c. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 351, 352.

page 61, l. 5. Vivorum, &c. Velleius Paterculus, ii. 36.

l. 14. The first edition reads "This, my lord, was", &c.

l. 21. a joint quarrel, &c. See pp. 39 and 50.

ll. 30-35. This statement likewise (cf. p. 60, l. 26) seems to argue a later date for the present passage than 1665. In any case, the allusion is anachronous, as the dialogue is supposed to take place on 3rd June, and the plague did not reach its height till August or September. The first edition reads "the great plague".

page 62, ll. 14-19. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, ii. 7. The "other poet" was Publius Syrus.

ll. 23, &c. Crites brings forward the same arguments against rhyme as he had already done in his real person in the Preface to *Four New Plays* (cf. p. 65, ll. 12 and 22). The following extract will show that Dryden reproduces in the *Essay* some of Sir Robert Howard's phrases:—

"Another way of the ancients which the French follow, and our stage has now lately practised, is to write in rhyme; and this is the dispute betwixt many ingenious persons, whether verse in rhyme, or verse without the sound, which may be called blank verse, (though a hard expression) is to be preferred? . . . In the general they are both proper, that is, one for a play, the other for a poem or copy of verses, a blank verse being as much too low for one as rhyme is unnatural for the other. A poem, being a premeditated form of thoughts upon designed occasions, ought not to be unfurnished of any harmony in words or sound the other is presented as the present effect of accidents not thought of, so that 'tis impossible it should be equally proper to both these, unless it were possible that all persons were born so much more than poets that verses were not to be composed by them, but already made in them. Some may object that this argument is trivial, because, whatever is showed, 'tis known still to be but a play, but such may as well excuse an ill scene, that is not naturally painted, because they know 'tis only a scene, and not really a city or country.

"But there is yet another thing which makes verse upon the stage appear more unnatural, that is, when a piece of a verse is made up by one that knew not what the other meant to say, and the former verse answered as perfectly in sound as the last is supplied in measure; so that the smartness of a reply, which has its beauty by coming from sudden thoughts, seems lost by that which rather looks like a design of two than the answer of one. It may be said that rhyme is such a confinement to a quick and luxuriant fancy, that it gives a stop to its speed till slow judgment comes in to assist it; but this is no argument for the question in hand; for the dispute is not which way a man may write best in, but which is most proper for the subject he writes upon; and if this were let pass, the argument is yet unsolved in itself; for he that wants judgment in the liberty of his fancy, may as well show the defect of it in

its confinement; and to say truth, he that has judgment will avoid the errors, and he that wants it will commit them both. It may be objected, 'tis improbable that any should speak *ex tempore* as well as Beaumont and Fletcher makes them, though in blank verse; I do not only acknowledge that, but that 'tis also improbable any will write so well that way; but if that may be allowed improbable, I believe it may be concluded impossible that any should speak as good verses in rhyme as the best poets have writ; and therefore that which seems nearest to what it intends is ever to be preferred. Nor is great thoughts more adorned by verse, than verse unbeautified by mean ones; so that verse seems not only unfit in the best use of it, but much more in the worse, when a servant is called, or a door bid to be shut in rhyme. Verses (I mean good ones) do in their height of fancy declare the labour that brought them forth, like majesty that grows with care; and nature that made the poet capable, seems to retire, and leave its offers to be made perfect by pains and judgment."

Crites is more learned than Sir Robert Howard, and argues more clearly, while their prose styles are not to be compared.

page 63, l. 1. says Aristotle, *Poetics*, iv: "Once dialogue had come in, Nature herself discovered the appropriate measure. For the iambic is, of all measures, the most colloquial: we see it in the fact that conversational speech runs into iambic form more frequently than into any other kind of verse."

ll. 23, 24. Arcades, &c. Virgil, *Eclogues*, vii. 4, 5.

l. 25. quicquid conabar dicere. Ovid says of himself, according to the usual reading, "et quod tentabam dicere versus erat" (*Tristia*, iv. 10. 26): like Pope, he "lisped in numbers, for the numbers came". The same form of the quotation appears in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (ed. Shuckburgh, p. 50).

l. 32. Ars est celare artem. The author of this well-known saying is unidentified. Erasmus, in *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, has the remark, "An non hoc ipse docuit Cicero, caput artis esse dissimulare artem?" (Quoted by Mr. Strunk in his *Dryden, Essays on the Drama*, New York, 1898). Ovid has "si latet ars prodest", *Ars Amatoria*, ii. 313.

page 64, l. 21. you say. Crites here replies not to Neander,

but to Dryden. In the Preface to the *Rival Ladies*, Dryden had stated that one of the advantages which rhyme has over blank verse is that "it bounds and circumscribes the fancy. . . . The great easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant." No such statement has already been made in the *Essay*.

ll. 33, &c. Dryden here makes a curious mistake. Marcus Seneca, the rhetorician, says of Ovid "nescit quod bene cessit relinquere" in his *Controversiae*, ix. 5, but the instance he gives is from the *Metamorphoses*, xiii. 503-505. It is Lucius Seneca, the philosopher, who instances "Omnia pontus erat", &c. (*Metam.* i. 292), and with approbation, in his *Quaestiones Naturales*, iii. 27.

page 65, ll. 14, &c. Neander's speech is Dryden's personal reply to Sir Robert Howard.

l. 18. See the third note to the Dedication.

ll. 21, &c. both, &c. Apparently some such words as 'to you and' have been omitted after *both*.

l. 26. Cf. pp. 62, ll. 1, 2, and 39, l. 10.

page 67, ll. 6, &c. Dryden secures "variety of cadences" in his own rhymed plays by the two means here mentioned—*enjambements* (when "the close of the sense falls into the middle of the next verse") and hemistichs.

l. 8. prevail himself of. French *se prévaloir de*. Cf. 'contents itself', p. 10, l. 14.

l. 14. perpetuo tenore fluere Cf. Cicero, *Orator*, vi.

l. 35 The advantages of rhyme mentioned in the Preface to the *Rival Ladies* are, besides the curb it puts on a luxuriant fancy, "the help it brings to memory", and its "grace" in "the quickness of repartees".

page 68, l. 16 Daniel's *Defence of Rhyme* (1603) was written in reply to Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602). According to Daniel, there are examples of "the Turkish rymes iust of the measure of our verse of eleuen sillables, in feminine ryme neuer begotten I am perswaded by any example in Europe, but borne no doubt in Scythia, and brought over Caucasus and Mount Taurus. The Sclauonian and Arabian tonges acquaint a great part of Asia and Affrique with it; the Moscouite, Polacke, Hungarian, German, Italian, French, and Spaniard, vse no other harmonie of words. The

Irish, Briton, Scot, Dane, Saxon, English, and all the inhabitants of this island, either have hither brought, or here found the same in use. And such a force hath it in nature, or so made by nature, as the Latine numbers notwithstanding their excellencie, seemed not sufficient to satisfie the eare of the world thereunto accustomed, without this harmonical cadence." In his short note on the verse of *Paradise Lost* (1667), Milton says that rhyme is "no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, . . . but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre". It is perhaps unnecessary to add that modern scholarship does not bear out Dryden's views on the origin of rhyme, or the statement that English is a dialect of Latin.

The reference to Daniel's *Defence of Rhyme* and the phrase "at least we are able . . . antiquity" were not in the first edition of the *Essay*.

page 69, l. 4. Pindaric way. See note on p. 7, l. 28.

the *Siege of Rhodes*, by Sir William Davenant, was produced by permission in 1656; and after the Restoration, when the theatres were again opened, it was enlarged to two parts, each of five acts (published 1663). It is historically important as being the first attempt at opera in this country, as well as one of the models of the heroic play (cf. note, p. 12, l. 25). Dryden refers to it again in his *Essay of Heroic Plays*, where he says Davenant introduced in it "examples of moral virtue, writ in verse, and performed in recitative music. The original of this music, and of the scenes which adorned his work, he had from the Italian operas; but he heightened his characters, as I may probably imagine, from the examples of Corneille and some French poets. In this condition did this part of poetry remain at his Majesty's return; when, growing bolder, as being now owned by a public authority, he reviewed his *Siege of Rhodes* and caused it to be acted as a just drama."

l. 16. The Spanish tragedies are generally in assonance, not in perfect rhyme.

page 70, ll. 28, 29. Tentanda, &c. Virgil, *Georgics*, iii. 8, 9: *possum* should be *possim*.

page 71, ll. 9, 10. The translation of the Psalms by Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549) and John Hopkins (d. 1570) was for long so popular that more than six hundred editions were printed

Irish, Briton, Scot, Dane, Saxon, English, and all the inhabitants of this iland, either haue hither brought, or here found the same in vse. And such a force hath it in nature, or so made by nature, as the Latine numbers notwithstanding their excellencie, seemed not sufficient to satisfie the eare of the world thereunto accustomed, without this harmonicale cadence." In his short note on the verse of *Paradise Lost* (1667), Milton says that rhyme is "no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, . . . but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre". It is perhaps unnecessary to add that modern scholarship does not bear out Dryden's views on the origin of rhyme, or the statement that English is a dialect of Latin.

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from 1549, the date of the first issue, to 1828. The translation by George Sandys (1578-1641) appeared in 1636, and at once found more favour with cultured readers, but never enjoyed so great popularity.

ll. 14, 15. Est ubi, &c. Horace, *Epistles*, ii. 1. 63. The correct quotation is "Interdum vulgus rectum videt, est ubi peccat".

l. 22. Mustapha, *the Son of Solymán the Magnificent* (produced 1665), was one of the four heroic plays of Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery (1621-1679). Dryden dedicated the *Rival Ladies* to him, and Sir Robert Howard sings his praises in the Preface to *Four New Plays*.

the Indian Queen. See the third note to the Dedication.

page 72, ll. 15, 16. Indignatur, &c. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 90, 91.

l. 18. Effutire, &c. *Ib.* 231.

ll. 19, &c. It is an instructive fact in the history of seventeenth-century prosody that *Paradise Lost* (1667) appeared about the same time that blank verse was "acknowledged to be too low for a poem". Dryden alludes to a statement by Sir Robert Howard; see the quotation, p. 111.

l. 21. sonnet, used in the loose sense of song, or "paper of verses".

l. 22. Aristotle, *Poetics*, xxvi.

page 73, ll. 22, 23. The underlying principle of Neander's defence of rhyme is that "a play, to be like nature, is to be set above it". Crites, on the other hand, argues that "the nearer anything comes to the imitation of truth, the more it pleases" (p. 64).

page 74, l. 18. quilibet audendi. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 10.

l. 20. Musas colere severiores. Martial, *Epigrams*, ix. 11. 17.

page 75, ll. 1, &c. The following couplets from the *Indian Emperor*, Act. 1, Scene 2, may illustrate what Dryden means by the "quick and poignant brevity" of repartee in rhyme:—

Odmar.

Madam, though you see

The king is kind, I hope your modesty

Will know what distance to the crown is due.

Almeria. Distance and modesty, prescribed by you!

Odmar. Almeria dares not think such thoughts as these.

Almeria. She dares both think and act what thoughts she please.

ll. 13-19. Cf. p. 67, ll. 3-6, and p. 78, ll. 18, 19. These three statements of Dryden, which indicate so clearly his own views and his method of writing, are particularly valuable in connection with the rise of the correct or classical school of poetry. See Introduction.

page 76, l. 6. the Water-poet's rhymes. John Taylor (1580-1653), called the Water-poet from being a waterman on the Thames, was a most voluminous author of doggerel. About 160 of his pieces are preserved, most of which have been reprinted by the Spenser Society. He enjoyed great popularity. Ben Jonson, who knew him personally, refers to him in his *Discoveries*: "There are never wanting that dare prefer the worst preachers, the worst pleaders, the worst poets. . . . Nay, if it were put to the question of the Water-rhymer's works, against Spenser's, I doubt not but they would find more suffrages; because the most favour common vices, out of a prerogative the vulgar have to lose their judgments and like that which is naught."

l. 11. *Delectus verborum*, &c. See Cicero, *Brutus*, 72.

l. 17. *Reserate*, &c. Seneca, *Hippolytus*, 860.

ll. 24, 25. For if . . . blank verse, not in the first edition.

page 77, l. 5. *sense*. So in the first edition. The second and third editions read *scene*.

ll. 28, 29. a most acute person, Sir Robert Howard. See note to p. 62, ll. 23, &c.

page 78, l. 19. Dryden's statement that verse is a slow and painful kind of working may be compared with Boileau's, that a "poème excellent" is a "pénible ouvrage" (*Art poétique*, iii. 309, 311).

Dryden's letter to Sir Robert Howard on the *Annus Mirabilis* contains a passage curiously inconsistent in several points with the opinions expressed in the *Essay*, though it was written about the same time: "I have chosen to write my poem in quatrains or stanzas of four in alternate rhyme, because I have ever judged them more noble and of greater dignity both for the sound and number than any other verse in use amongst us; in which I am sure I have your approbation. The learned

languages have certainly a great advantage of us in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme, and were less constrained in the quantity of every syllable, which they might vary with spondees or dactyls, besides so many other helps of grammatical figures for the lengthening or abbreviation of them, than the modern are in the close of that one syllable, which often confines, and more often corrupts, the sense of all the rest. But in this necessity of our rhymes, I have always found the couplet verse most easy (though not so proper for this occasion), for there the work is sooner at an end, every two lines concluding the labour of the poet." ("Globe" *Dryden*, p. 38.) The letter is dated 10th November, 1666.

page 79, ll. 3, &c. Somerset-Stairs, to the west of old Somerset House, done away with at the end of last century when the new building was erected. "More westwards is a large yard . . . at the bottom of which is a pair of stairs much used by watermen, this being a noted place for landing and taking water at" (Strype's edition of Stow's *Survey of London*, 1720, iv, p. 112).

l. 13. The Piazzes, or Piazzas, occupied the north and east sides of Covent Garden. They are frequently mentioned in the literature of the period (e.g. Congreve's *Old Bachelor*, iii. 2 and the *Spectator*, Nos. 14 and 67). Cf. *Survey of London*, vi, p. 87.

ll. 13, 14. Pepys's *Diary* (1st July, 1663, and 23rd October, 1668) may perhaps give a fair idea of the nature of Buckhurst's and Sedley's "pleasant appointment".

APPENDIX A

DRYDEN'S CORRECTIONS OF THE TEXT

The following list of alterations made by Dryden on the text of the first edition (1668) includes merely those which affect the style; and it does not make claim to completeness, though all the important corrections are given. The chief changes affecting the matter of the *Essay* are given in the notes. It will be seen that Dryden has eliminated old forms and colloquialisms, corrected the use of the relative, replaced several verbs requiring a preposition, brought forward the preposition to the beginning of a relative clause, and altered those phrases or sentences which end with a small word. In general, he has aimed at trimming the syntax and improving the rhythm.

P.	L.	1668	1684, 1693
xxiv.	31.	as the fourth act of <i>Pompey</i> will furnish me with ¹	as those with which the fourth . . . furnish me
xxv.	11.	the lookers on	the sight
	26.	of it	of them
xxvii.	15.	upon this subject	on the same subject
	1.	we knew	they knew
	3.	1. called for	desired
		2. people you speak of	people of whom you speak
		7. and after	after
		8. [omitted]	they will
	20.	than Sylla the Dictator did one of their brethren heretofore	than one of their brethren was by Sylla the Dictator
	4.	9. yet ought	yet he ought
		11. think themselves so	think themselves to be such
	5.	24. the great ones ²	great persons

¹ In the *Defence of the Epilogue to the Conquest of Granada* (1672), Dryden includes among the faults of Ben Jonson "the preposition in the end of the sentence; a common fault with him, and which I have but lately observed in my own writings".

² "Ones" is instanced by Dryden in the *Defence of the Epilogue* as a fault.

L.	1668	1684, 1693
25.	of a great person	of one
32.	himself very hardly dealt with	he had hard measure
10.	upon	on
13.	I live in	in which I live
22.	were so	were
19.	who writ	who had writ
7.	foundation	foundations
13.	to a great perfection	to great perfection
17.	[omitted]	that desire
24.	through with it	through the work
2.	that	which
3.	which	who
12.	has	have
29.	as namely	namely
15.	you behold him not	they suffer you not to be- hold him
7.	he that enters the second	he who enters second
17.	writ	written
22.	of his	of them ¹
30.	are to be had	are in our hands
35.	whose wit	the wit of which
4.	know it	understand
25.	produce Father Ben to you	produce before you Father Ben
29.	good ones	good plays
31.	esteem	admire
33.	waited	had waited
1.	a hundred or two of verses	a hundred or more verses
20.	take	taking
24.	wench	mistress
32.	[omitted]	which was
30.	that	which
33.	enters in a mistake the house	enters by mistake into the house
1.	garboils	disorders
10.	managing of 'em	management
5.	their tragedies	the tragedies of the ancients
35.	borrow's of	borrow's from
28.	he lived in	in which he lived

The original reading is the better. The correction is not strictly grammatical, though the sense is clear.

P. L.	1668	1684, 1693
29. 5.	touching upon	observing
30. 8.	and fourth a duel	and a duel
23.	forced in	forced into it
25.	restringents upon it	restringents
32. 14.	close	closely
34. 30.	which we are subject to	to which we are subject
35. 15.	naturally do it	do it
19.	persuade us to	insinuate into us
36. 24.	they	the players
38. 1.	managing	management
11.	to take them off	to take them off their design
23.	to get it up again	to get up again what he had lost
26.	hear of	hear
31.	which	which rule
39. 2.	exits of their actors...their	exit of the actor...his
40. 17.	He that	He who
32.	to clear it up	to clear it and reconcile them
35.	of afar off	afar off
42. 7.	and that we find	which we find
23.	Ours	Our plays
26.	just as	as
43. 25.	in the tedious visits	in tedious visits
35.	as our parsons do	like our parsons
44. 3.	an hundred or two hundred lines	an hundred lines
9.	comedy is...tragedy	comedies are...tragedies
26.	can arrive at	can reasonably hope to reach
45. 25.	the end he aimed at	the end at which he aimed
26.	which	both which
33.	when they hide...and choose	to hide...and to choose
46. 12.	blows which are struck	blows
47. 21.	tied up	bounded
30.	bound up	limited
49. 2.	in through a doo	into a place of safety
8.	upon his sad condition	on the subject of his sad condition
9.	goes on	goes forward
50. 12.	look upon	read
21.	from whence	whence

P. L.	1668	1684, 1693
11. 16.	a little envy upon	some envy on
12. 7.	treated of	done
35.	can ever paint	before them could paint
13. 1.	This humour	Humour.
14. 15.	the idiom of their language	their language
16.	with ours	with the idiom of ours
15. 12.	once apiece	once
27.	this the poet seems to allude to	to this the poet seems to allude.
17. 17.	common customs	customs
18. 25.	had prevailed himself of	has made use of
13. 19.	light upon	imagine (<i>probably a printer's mistake</i>)
14. 13.	tend to and seek after	tend to
20.	this miserable necessity you are forced upon	you are often forced on this miserable necessity
15. 11.	but being (<i>perhaps a mistake for "seeing"</i>)	but since
16. 23.	disposing	disposition.
17. 4.	concludes upon	establishes
22.	improper to	unnatural in
18. 9	brought in	introduced
19. 15.	all nations all the French, &c.	nations the French, &c.
20. 22.	blown upon	used
24.	could not make	could not now make
21. 25.	You said the dialogue, &c	You said that the dialogue
14. 1.	one's	man's
15. 21.	you pass to the most mean ones, those which are common with	you pass to those which are most mean, and which are common with
7. 21.	[<i>omitted</i>]	on that supposition
33.	so infallible	or rather so infallible
18. 9.	was had	is has
19. 7.	which the moonbeams played upon	upon which the moonbeams played

The third edition (1693) of the *Essay* is a direct reprint of the second edition (1684), but the spellings are occasionally modernized; e.g. "conceit" p. 3, l. 11, and "chese-nlaver".
p. 60, l. 1.

APPENDIX B

HOWARD'S ANSWER AND DRYDEN'S DEFENCE

Sir Robert Howard replied to the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* in the Preface to his *Great Favourite, or The Duke of Lerma* (1668), and Dryden answered in the *Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, prefixed to the second edition (1668) of his *Indian Emperor*. There were thus five contributions to the Dryden-Howard controversy—Dryden's Epistle Dedicatory to the *Rival Ladies* (1664), Howard's Preface to *Four New Plays* (1665), the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Howard's Preface to *The Duke of Lerma* (1668), and Dryden's *Defence* (1668). The first two are re-stated and expanded in the third.

THE PREFACE TO *THE DUKE OF LERMA*

[Reprinted in Howard's *Five New Plays*, 1692, in Dryden's *Prose Works*, ed. Malone, 1800, and in Arber's *English Garner*, 1880.]

I cannot plead the usual excuse for publishing this trifle, which is commonly the subject of most prefaces, by charging it upon the importunity of friends; for, I confess, I was myself willing, at the first desire of Mr. Herringman, to print it: not for any great opinion that I had entertained, but for the opinion that others were pleased to express; which being told me by some friends, I was concerned to let the world judge what subject-matter of offence was contained in it. Some were pleased to believe little of it mine: but they are both obliging to me, though perhaps not intentionally; the last, by thinking there was anything in it that was worth so ill-designed an envy, as to place it to another author; the others, perhaps the best bred informers, by continuing their displeasure towards me, since I most gratefully acknowledge to have received some advantage in the opinion of the sober part of the world by the loss of theirs.

For the subject, I came accidentally to write upon it; for a gentleman brought a play to the King's Company, called *The Duke of Lerma*; and by them I was desired to peruse it, and

return my opinion, whether I thought it fit for the stage. After I had read it, I acquainted them that in my judgment it would not be of much use for such a design; since the contrivance scarce would merit the name of a plot, and some of that assisted by a disguise; and it ended abruptly; and on the person of Philip the Third there was fixed such a mean character, and on the daughter of the Duke of Lerma such a vicious one, that I could not but judge it unfit to be presented by any that had a respect, not only to princes, but indeed to either man or woman. And about that time, being to go into the country, I was persuaded by Mr. Hart to make it my diversion there, that so great a hint might not be lost, as the Duke of Lerma saving himself in his last extremity by his unexpected disguise, which is as well in the true story as in the old play; and besides that and the names, my altering the most part of the characters, and the whole design, made me incapable to use much more, though perhaps written with higher style and thoughts than I could attain to.

I intend not to trouble myself nor the world any more in such subjects, but take my leave of these my too long acquaintances, since that little fancy and liberty I once enjoyed is now fettered in business of more unpleasant natures. Yet were I free to apply my thoughts as my own choice directed them, I should hardly again venture into the civil wars of censures,

Ubi . . . nullos habitura triumphos

In the next place, I must ingeniously confess that the manner of plays which now are in most esteem is beyond my power to perform; nor do I condemn in the least anything of what nature soever that pleases, since nothing could appear to me a ruder folly than to censure the satisfaction of others. I rather blame the unnecessary understanding of some that have laboured to give strict rules to things that are not mathematical, and with such eagerness pursuing their own seeming reasons that at last we are to apprehend such argumentative poets will grow as strict as Sancho Panza's doctor was to our very appetites for in the difference of tragedy and comedy, and of farce itself, there can be no determination but by the taste, nor in the manner of their composure. And whoever would endeavour to like or dislike by the rules of others, he

will be as unsuccessful as if he should try to be persuaded into a power of believing, not what he must, but what others direct him to believe. But I confess 'tis not necessary for poets to study strict reason, since they are so used to a greater latitude than is allowed by that severe inquisition, that they must infringe their own jurisdiction to profess themselves obliged to argue well. I will not therefore pretend to say why I writ this play, *some scenes in blank verse, others in rhyme*, since I have no better a reason to give than chance, which waited upon my present fancy: and I expect no better a reason from any ingenious person than his fancy for which he best relishes.

I cannot therefore but beg leave of the reader to take a little notice of the great pains the author of an *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* has taken to prove rhyme as natural in a serious play, and more effectual, than blank verse. Thus he states the question, but pursues that which he calls natural in a wrong application; for 'tis not the question, whether rhyme or not rhyme be best or most natural for a grave and serious subject, but what is nearest the nature of that which it presents. Now, after all the endeavours of that ingenious person, a play will still be supposed to be a composition of several persons speaking *ex tempore*; and 'tis as certain that good verses are the hardest things that can be imagined to be so spoken. So that if any one will be pleased to impose the rule of measuring things to be the best by being nearest nature, it is granted, by consequence, that which is most remote from the thing supposed must needs be most improper; and therefore I may justly say that both I and the question were equally mistaken. For I do own I had rather read good verses than either blank verse or prose; and therefore the author did himself injury, if he like verse so well in plays, to lay down rules to raise arguments only unanswerable against himself.

But the same author, being filled with the precedents of the ancients writing their plays in verse, commends the thing, and assures us that our language is noble, full, and significant, charging all defects upon the ill placing of words, and proves it by quoting Seneca loftily expressing such an ordinary thing as *shutting a door*:

Reserate clusos regii postes Laris.

strictly and duly weighed, 'tis as impossible for one stage to represent two houses or two rooms truly as two countries or kingdoms, and as impossible that five hours or four-and-twenty hours should be two hours and a half, as that a thousand hours or years should be less than what they are, or the greatest part of time to be comprehended in the less; for, all being impossible, they are none of them nearest the truth or nature of what they present; for impossibilities are all equal, and admit no degrees. And then, if all those poets that have so fervently laboured to give rules as maxims, would but be pleased to abbreviate, or endure to hear their reasons reduced into one strict definition, it must be that there are degrees in impossibilities, and that many things which are not possible may yet be more or less impossible; and from this proceed to give rules to observe the least absurdity in things which are not at all.

I suppose I need not trouble the reader with so impertinent a delay to attempt a farther confutation of such ill-grounded reasons than thus by opening the true state of the case; nor do I design to make any further use of it than from hence to draw this modest conclusion, that I would have all attempts of this nature be submitted to the fancy of others, and bear the name of propositions, not of confident laws or rules made by demonstration; and then I shall not discommend any poet that dresses his play in such a fashion as his fancy best approves, and fairly leave it for others to follow, if it appears to them most convenient and fullest of ornament.

But, writing this Epistle in so much haste, I had almost forgot one argument or observation which that author has most good fortune in. It is in his Epistle Dedicatory before his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, where, speaking of rhymes in plays, he desires it may be observed that none are violent against it but such as have not attempted it, or who have succeeded ill in the attempt; which as to myself and him I easily acknowledge, for I confess none has written in that way better than himself, nor few worse than I. Yet I hope he is so ingenuous that he would not wish this argument should extend further than to him and me; for if it should be received as a good one, all divines and philosophers would find a readier way of confutation than they yet have done, of any that should oppose

the least thesis or definition, by saying they were denied by none but such as never attempted to write, or succeeded ill in the attempt.

Thus, as I am one that am extremely well pleased with most of the propositions which are ingeniously laid down in that *Essay* for regulating the stage, so I am also always concerned for the true honour of Reason, and would have no spurious issue fathered upon her. Fancy may be allowed her wantonness; but Reason is always pure and chaste: and, as it resembles the sun in making all things clear, it also resembles it in its several positions; when it shines in full height, and directly ascendant over any subject, it leaves but little shadow; but when descended and grown low, its oblique shining renders the shadow larger than the substance, and gives the deceived person a wrong measure of his own proportion.

Thus, begging the reader's excuse for this seeming impertinency, I submit what I have written to the liberty of his unconfined opinion; which is all the favour I ask of others to afford me.

A DEFENCE OF AN ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESY

[Prefixed to the second edition only of *The Indian Emperor*: Dryden suppressed it in future editions, and it was not reprinted till after his death.]

The former edition of *The Indian Emperor* being full of faults, which had escaped the printer, I have been willing to overlook this second with more care; and though I could not allow myself so much time as was necessary, yet, by that little I have done, the press is freed from some gross errors which it had to answer for before. As for the more material faults of writing, which are properly mine, though I see many of them, I want leisure to amend them. 'Tis enough for those who make one poem the business of their lives, to leave that correct: yet, excepting Virgil, I never met with any which was so in any language.

But while I was thus employed about this impression, there came to my hands a new printed play, called *The Great Favourite, or The Duke of Lerma*, the author of which, a noble and most ingenious person, has done me the favour to make

some observations and animadversions upon my *Dramatic Essay*. I must confess he might have better consulted his reputation than by matching himself with so weak an adversary. But if his honour be diminished in the choice of his antagonist, it is sufficiently recompensed in the election of his cause: which, being the weaker, in all appearance, as combating the received opinions of the best ancient and modern authors, will add to his glory if he overcome, and to the opinion of his generosity if he be vanquished: since he engages at so great odds, and so, like a cavalier, undertakes the protection of the weaker party. I have only to fear on my own behalf, that so good a cause as mine may not suffer by my ill management or weak defence; yet I cannot in honour but take the glove when 'tis offered me: though I am only a champion by succession, and no more able to defend the right of Aristotle and Horace, than an infant Dymock to maintain the title of a king.

For my own concernment in the controversy, it is so small that I can easily be contented to be driven from a few notions of dramatic poesy; especially by one who has the reputation of understanding all things: and I might justly make that excuse for my yielding to him, which the philosopher made to the emperor, "Why should I offer to contend with him, who is master of more than twenty legions of arts and sciences?" But I am forced to fight, and therefore it will be no shame to be overcome.

Yet I am so much his servant as not to meddle with anything which does not concern me in his *Preface*; therefore I leave the good sense and other excellencies of the first twenty lines to be considered by the critics. As for the play of *The Duke of Lerma*, having so much altered and beautified it, as he has done, it can justly belong to none but him. Indeed, they must be extreme ignorant as well as envious who would rob him of that honour; for you see him putting in his claim to it, even in the first two lines:

Repulse upon repulse, like waves thrown back,
That slide to hang upon obdurate rocks.

After this, let detraction do its worst; for if this be not his, it deserves to be. For my part, I declare for distributive

justice; and from this and what follows, he certainly deserves those advantages which he acknowledges to have received from the opinion of sober men

In the next place, I must beg leave to observe his great address in courting the reader to his party. For intending to assault all poets, both ancient and modern, he discovers not his whole design at once, but seems only to aim at me, and attacks me on my weakest side, my defence of verse.

To begin with me, he gives me the compellation of "the author of a *Dramatic Essay*", which is a little discourse in dialogue, for the most part borrowed from the observations of others: therefore, that I may not be wanting to him in civility, I return his compliment by calling him "the author of *The Duke of Lerma*".

But (that I may pass over his salute) he takes notice of my great pains to prove rhyme as natural in a serious play, and more effectual than blank verse. Thus, indeed, I did state the question; but he tells me, I pursue that which I call natural in a wrong application: for 'tis not the question whether rhyme or not rhyme be best or most natural for a serious subject, but what is nearest the nature of that it represents.

If I have formerly mistaken the question, I must confess my ignorance so far as to say I continue still in my mistake: but he ought to have proved that I mistook it; for it is yet but *gratis dictum*: I still shall think I have gained my point, if I can prove that rhyme is best or most natural for a serious subject. As for the question as he states it, whether rhyme be nearest the nature of what it represents, I wonder he should think me so ridiculous as to dispute whether prose or verse be nearest to ordinary conversation.

It still remains for him to prove his inference, that, since verse is granted to be more remote than prose from ordinary conversation, therefore no serious plays ought to be writ in verse: and when he clearly makes that good, I will acknowledge his victory as absolute as he can desire it.

The question now is, which of us two has mistaken it; and if it appear I have not, the world will suspect what gentleman that was, who was allowed to speak twice in parliament, because he had not spoken yet to the question; and perhaps conclude it to be the same, who (as 'tis reported) maintained

a contradiction *in terminis*, in the face of three hundred persons.

But to return to verse: whether it be natural or not in plays, is a problem which is not demonstrable of either side: 'tis enough for me that he acknowledges he had rather read good verse than prose: for if all the enemies of verse will confess as much, I shall not need to prove that it is natural. I am satisfied if it cause delight: for delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place; for poesy only instructs as it delights. 'Tis true, that to imitate well is a poet's work; but to affect the soul, and excite the passions, and above all to move admiration, which is the delight of serious plays, a bare imitation will not serve. The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate, must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poesy; and must be such, as, strictly considered, could never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation.

As for what he urges, that a play will still be supposed to be a composition of several persons speaking *ex tempore*, and that good verses are the hardest things which can be imagined to be so spoken, I must crave leave to dissent from his opinion, as to the former part of it: for, if I am not deceived, a play is supposed to be the work of the poet, imitating or representing the conversation of several persons; and this I think to be as clear as he thinks the contrary.

But I will be bolder, and do not doubt to make it good, though a paradox, that one great reason why prose is not to be used in serious plays, is, because it is too near the nature of converse: there may be too great a likeness; as the most skilful painters affirm that there may be too near a resemblance in a picture: to take every lineament and feature is not to make an excellent piece, but to take so much only as will make a beautiful resemblance of the whole, and, with an ingenious flattery of nature, to heighten the beauties of some part and hide the deformities of the rest. For so says Horace:

Ut pictura poesis crit . . .
Haec amat obscurum, vult haec sub luce videri,
Judicis argutum quae non formidat acumen.

. . . *et quae*
Desperat tractata nitescere posse, relinquit.

In *Bartholomew Fair*, or the lowest kind of comedy, that degree of heightening is used which is proper to set off that subject. 'Tis true the author was not there to go out of prose, as he does in his higher arguments of comedy, *The Fox*, and *Alchemist*; yet he does so raise his matter in that prose as to render it delightful; which he could never have performed, had he only said or done those very things that are daily spoken or practised in the Fair; for then the Fair itself would be as full of pleasure to an ingenious person as the play; which we manifestly see it is not. But he hath made an excellent lazar of it: the copy is of price, though the original be vile. You see in *Catiline* and *Sejanus*, where the argument is great, he sometimes ascends to verse, which shows he thought it not unnatural in serious plays; and had his genius been as proper for rhyme as it was for humour, or had the age in which he lived attained to as much knowledge in verse as ours, it is probable he would have adorned those subjects with that kind of writing.

Thus prose, though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed, as too weak for the government of serious plays; and he falling, there now start up two competitors: one the nearer in blood, which is blank verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him; but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing. For this reason of delight, the ancients (whom I will still believe as wise as those who so confidently correct them) wrote all their tragedies in verse, though they knew it most remote from conversation.

But I perceive I am falling into the danger of another rebuke from my opponent; for when I plead that the ancients used verse, I prove not that they would have admitted rhyme, had it then been written: all I can say is only this; that it seems to have succeeded verse by the general consent of poets in all modern languages: for almost all their serious plays are written in it: which, though it be no demonstration that therefore they ought to be so, yet at least the practice first, and then the continuation of it, shows that it attained the end, which was to please; and if that cannot be compassed here, I

will be the first who shall lay it down. For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents, and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gaiety of humour which is required to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved: in short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company or make repartees. So that those who decry my comedies do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: reputation in them is the last thing to which I shall pretend. I beg pardon for entertaining the reader with so ill a subject; but before I quit that argument, which was the cause of this digression, I cannot but take notice how I am corrected for my quotation of Seneca, in my defence of plays in verse. My words are these: "Our language is noble, full, and significant; and I know not why he who is master of it, may not clothe ordinary things in it as decently as the Latin, if he use the same diligence in his *choice of words*. One would think *unlock a door* was a thing as vulgar as could be spoken; yet Seneca could make it sound high and lofty in his Latin:

Reserate clusos regii postes Laris."

But he says of me that, being filled with the precedents of the ancients, who writ their plays in verse, I commend the thing; declaring our language to be full, noble, and significant, and charging all defects upon the *ill placing of words*, which I prove by quoting Seneca loftily expressing such an ordinary thing as *shutting a door*.

Here he manifestly mistakes; for I spoke not of the placing, but of the choice of words; for which I quoted that aphorism of Julius Cæsar: *delectus verborum est origo eloquentiæ*: but *delectus verborum* is no more Latin for the placing of words, than *reserate* is Latin for *shut the door*, as he interprets it, which I ignorantly construed *unlock* or *open* it.

He supposes I was highly affected with the sound of those words; and I suppose I may more justly imagine it of him; for if he had not been extremely satisfied with the sound, he would have minded the sense a little better.

But these are now to be no faults: for ten days after his

book is published, and that his mistakes are grown so famous that they are come back to him, he sends his *Errata* to be printed, and annexed to his play; and desires that instead of *shutting* you would read *opening*; which, it seems, was the printer's fault. I wonder at his modesty, that he did not rather say it was Seneca's, or mine; and that in some authors, *reserare* was to *shut* as well as to *open*, as the word *barach*, say the learned, is both to *bless* and *curse*.

Well, since it was the printer, he was a naughty man to commit the same mistake twice in six lines: I warrant you *delectus verborum* for *placing of words* was his mistake too, though the author forgot to tell him of it: if it were my book, I assure you I should. For those rascals ought to be the proxies of every gentleman-author, and to be chastised for him, when he is not pleased to own an error. Yet since he has given the *Errata*, I wish he would have enlarged them only a few sheets more, and then he would have spared me the labour of an answer: for this cursed printer is so given to mistakes, that there is scarce a sentence in the *Preface* without some false grammar or hard sense in it, which will all be charged upon the poet, because he is so good-natured as to lay but three errors to the printer's account, and to take the rest upon himself, who is better able to support them. But he needs not apprehend that I should strictly examine those little faults, except I am called upon to do it: I shall return therefore to that quotation of Seneca, and answer not to what he writes, but to what he means. I never intended it as an argument, but only as an illustration of what I had said before concerning the election of words and all he can charge me with is only this, that if Seneca could make an ordinary thing sound well in Latin by the choice of words, the same, with the like care, might be performed in English: if it cannot, I have committed an error on the right hand, by commending too much the copiousness and well-sounding of our language; which I hope my countrymen will pardon me. At least the words which follow in my dramatic essay will plead somewhat in my behalf, for I say there that this objection happens but seldom in a play; and then too either the meanness of the expression may be avoided, or shut out from the verse by breaking it in the midst.

But I have said too much in the defence of verse; for after it is a very indifferent thing to me whether it obtain or not. I am content hereafter to be ordered by his rule, that to write it sometimes, because it pleases me; and so much rather, because he has declared that it pleases him. That he has taken his last farewell of the Muses, and he has done it civilly, by honouring them with the name of his long acquaintances; which is a compliment they have scarce derived from him. For my own part, I bear a share in the public loss; and how emulous soever I may be of his fame and reputation, I cannot but give this testimony of his style, that it is extreme poetical, even in oratory; his thoughts elevated sometimes above common apprehension; his notions pathetic and grave, and tending to the instruction of princes, and formation of states; that they are abundantly interlaced with variety of fancies, tropes, and figures, which the critics have variously branded with the name of obscurity and false summar.

Well, he is now fettered in business of more unpleasant nature: the Muses have lost him, but the commonwealth gains him; the corruption of a poet is the generation of a statesman. He will not venture again into the civil wars of censure, . . . *nullos habitura triumphos*; if he had not told us he had left the Muses, we might have half suspected it by that word *ubi*, which does not any way belong to them in that place; the rest of the verse is indeed Lucan's; but that, I will answer for it, is his own. Yet he has another reason for this disgust of poesy; for he says immediately after that the manner of plays which are now in most esteem is beyond his power to perform: to perform the manner of a tragedy, I confess is new English to me. However, he condemns not the satisfaction of others, but rather their unnecessary understanding, who, like Sancho Panza's doctor, prescribe strictly to our appetites; for, says he, in the difference between tragedy and comedy, and of farce itself, there can be no determination but by the taste, nor in the manner of their exposure.

We shall see him now as great a critic as he was a poet; and the reason why he excelled so much in poetry will be evident, for it will appear to have proceeded from the exactness

of his judgment. "In the difference of tragedy, comedy, and farce itself, there can be no determination but by the taste." I will not quarrel with the obscurity of his phrase, though I justly might, but beg his pardon if I do not rightly understand him: if he means that there is no essential difference betwixt comedy, tragedy, and farce, but what is only made by the people's taste, which distinguishes one of them from the other, that is so manifest an error that I need not lose time to contradict it. Were there neither judge, taste, nor opinion in the world, yet they would differ in their natures; for the action, character, and language of tragedy would still be great and high, that of comedy lower and more familiar: admiration would be the delight of one, and satire of the other.

I have but briefly touched upon these things, because, whatever his words are, I can scarce imagine that he who is "always concerned for the true honour of Reason, and would have no spurious issue fathered upon her," should mean anything so absurd as to affirm that there is no difference betwixt comedy and tragedy, but what is made by the taste only: unless he would have us understand the comedies of my Lord L., where the first act should be potages, the second fricasees, &c., and the fifth a *chère entière* of women.

I rather guess he means that betwixt one comedy or tragedy and another there is no other difference but what is made by the liking or disliking of the audience. This is indeed a less error than the former, but yet it is a great one. The liking or disliking of the people gives the play the denomination of good or bad, but does not really make or constitute it such. To please the people ought to be the poet's aim, because plays made for their delight; but it does not follow that they are always pleased with good plays, or that the plays which please them are always good. The humour of the people is now for comedy; therefore, in hope to please them, I write comedies rather than serious plays, and so far their taste prescribes to me: but it does not follow from that reason that comedy is to be preferred before tragedy in its own nature; for that which is so in its own nature cannot be otherwise, as a man cannot but be a rational creature: but the opinion of the people may alter, and in another age, or perhaps in this, serious plays may be set up above comedies.

This I think a sufficient answer: if it be not, he has provided me of an excuse; it seems, in his wisdom, he foresaw my weakness, and has found out this expedient for me, that "it is not necessary for poets to study strict reason; since they are so used to a greater latitude than is allowed by that severe inquisition, that they must infringe their own jurisdiction, to profess themselves obliged to argue well."

I am obliged to him for discovering to me this back door; but I am not yet resolved on my retreat: for I am of opinion that they cannot be good poets who are not accustomed to argue well. False reasonings and colours of speech are the certain marks of one who does not understand the stage; for moral truth is the mistress of the poet as much as of the philosopher. Poesy must resemble natural truth, but it must be ethical. Indeed the poet dresses truth, and adorns nature, but does not alter them:

Ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris.

Therefore that is not the best poesy which resembles notions of things that are not to things that are: though the fancy may be great and the words flowing, yet the soul is but half satisfied when there is not truth in the foundation. This is that which makes Virgil be preferred before the rest of poets: in variety of fancy and sweetness of expression you see Ovid far above him, for Virgil rejected many of those things which Ovid wrote. "A great wit's great work is to refuse", as my worthy friend, Sir John Birkenhead, has ingeniously expressed it: you rarely meet with any thing in Virgil but truth, which therefore leaves the strongest impression of pleasure in the soul. This I thought myself obliged to say in behalf of poesy; and to declare, though it be against myself, that when poets do not argue well, the defect is in the workman, not in the art.

And now I come to the boldest part of his discourse, wherein he attacks not me, but all the ancients and moderns; and undermines, as he thinks, the very foundations on which dramatic poesy is built. I could wish he would have declined that envy which must of necessity follow such an undertaking, and contented himself with triumphing over me in my opinions of verse, which I will never hereafter dispute with him; but he

must pardon me if I have that veneration for Aristotle, Horace, Ben Johnson, and Corneille, that I dare not serve him in such a cause, and against such heroes, but rather fight under their protection, as Homer reports of little Teucer, who shot the Trojans from under the large buckler of Ajax Telamon :

Στῆ δ' ὑπ' Ἀλκίος Τελαμωνιάδου, &c.

He stood beneath his brother's ample shield,
And covered there, shot death through all the field.

The words of my noble adversary are these :

"But if we examine the general rules laid down for plays by strict reason, we shall find the errors equally gross; for the great foundation which is laid to build upon is nothing, as it is generally stated, as will appear upon the examination of the particulars".

These particulars, in due time, shall be examined: in the mean while, let us consider what this great foundation is, which he says is "nothing, as it is generally stated". I never heard of any other foundation of dramatic poesy than the imitation of nature; neither was there ever pretended any other by the ancients or moderns, or me, who endeavour to follow them in that rule. This I have plainly said in my definition of a play: that it is a just and lively image of human nature, &c. Thus the foundation, as it is generally stated, will stand sure, if this definition of a play be true, if it be not, he ought to have made his exception against it, by proving that a play is not an imitation of nature, but somewhat else which he is pleased to sink it.

But it is very plain that he has mistaken the foundation for that which is built upon it, though not immediately: for the direct and immediate consequence is this, if nature be to be imitated, then there is a rule for imitating nature rightly; otherwise there may be an end, and no means conducing to it. Hitherto I have proceeded by demonstration; but as our divines, when they have proved a Deity because there is order, and have inferred that this Deity ought to be worshipped, differ afterwards in the manner of the worship, so, having laid down that nature is to be imitated, and that proposition proving the next, that then there are means which conduce to the imitating of nature, I dare proceed no farther

positively, but have only laid down some opinions of the ancients and moderns, and of my own, as means which they used, and which I thought probable for the attaining of that end. Those means are the same which my antagonist calls the foundations, how properly, the world may judge; and to prove that this is his meaning, he clears it immediately to you by enumerating those rules or propositions against which he makes his particular exceptions, as namely, those of time and place, in these words: "First, we are told the plot should not be so ridiculously contrived as to crowd two several countries into one stage; secondly, to cramp the accidents of many years or days into the representation of two hours and a half; and lastly, a conclusion drawn that the only remaining dispute is concerning time, whether it should be contained in twelve or twenty-four hours; and the place to be limited to that spot of ground where the play is supposed to begin; and this is called nearest nature; for that is concluded most natural which is most probable, and nearest to that which it presents".

Thus he has only made a small mistake of the means conducing to the end, for the end itself; and of the superstructure for the foundation: but he proceeds: "To show, therefore, upon what ill grounds they dictate laws for dramatic poesy, &c.". He is here pleased to charge me with being magisterial, as he has done in many other places of his Preface. Therefore in vindication of myself, I must crave leave to say that my whole discourse was sceptical, according to that way of reasoning which was used by Socrates, Plato, and all the Academics of old, which Tully and the best of the ancients followed, and which is imitated by the modest inquiries of the Royal Society. That it is so, not only the name will show, which is *An Essay*, but the frame and composition of the work. You see, it is a dialogue sustained by persons of several opinions, all of them left doubtful, to be determined by the readers in general; and more particularly deferred to the accurate judgment of my Lord Buckhurst, to whom I made a dedication of my book. These are my words in my Epistle, speaking of the persons whom I introduced in my dialogue: "'Tis true, they differed in their opinions, as 'tis probable they would; neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them, leaving your lordship to decide it in favour of that part

which you shall judge most reasonable". And after that, in my Advertisement to the Reader, I said this: "The drift of the ensuing discourse is chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English writers from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them. This I intimate, lest any should think me so exceeding vain as to teach others an art which they understand much better than myself." But this is more than necessary to clear my modesty in that point; and I am very confident that there is scarce any man who has lost so much time as to read that trifle, but will be my compurgator as to that arrogance whereof I am accused. The truth is, if I had been naturally guilty of so much vanity as to dictate my opinions, yet I do not find that the character of a positive or self-conceited person is of such advantage to any in this age that I should labour to be publicly admitted of that order.

But I am not now to defend my own cause, when that of all the ancients and moderns is in question: for this gentleman, who accuses me of arrogance, has taken a course not to be taxed with the other extreme of modesty. Those propositions which are laid down in my discourse, as helps to the better imitation of nature, are not mine (as I have said) nor were ever pretended so to be, but derived from the authority of Aristotle and Horace, and from the rules and examples of Ben Johnson and Corneille. These are the men with whom properly he contends, and against whom he will endeavour to make it evident that there is no such thing as what they all pretend.

His argument against the unities of place and time is this: "That it is as impossible for one stage to present two rooms or houses truly as two countries or kingdoms, and as impossible that five hours or twenty-four hours should be two hours, as that a thousand hours or years should be less than what they are, or the greatest part of time to be comprehended in the less: for, all of them being impossible, they are none of them nearest the truth or nature of what they present, for impossibilities are all equal, and admit of no degree

This argument is so scattered into parts that it can scarce be united into a syllogism; yet, in obedience to him, I will abbreviate and comprehend as much of it as I can in few words, that my answer to it may be more perspicuous. I conceive his meaning to be what follows, as to the unity of

place (if I mistake, I beg his pardon, professing it is not out of any design to play the *Argumentative Poet*): if one stage cannot properly present two rooms or houses, much less two countries or kingdoms, then there can be no unity of place; but one stage cannot properly perform this: therefore there can be no unity of place.

I plainly deny his minor proposition; the force of which, if I mistake not, depends on this, that the stage being one place cannot be two. This, indeed, is as great a secret as that we are all mortal; but to requite it with another, I must crave leave to tell him that though the stage cannot be two places, yet it may properly represent them, successively, or at several times. His argument is indeed no more than a mere fallacy, which will evidently appear when we distinguish place, as it relates to plays, into real and imaginary. The real place is that theatre, or piece of ground, on which the play is acted. The imaginary, that house, town, or country, where the action of the drama is supposed to be; or more plainly, where the scene of the play is laid. Let us now apply this to that Herculean argument, which, if strictly and duly weighed, is to make it evident that there is no such thing as what they all pretend. It is impossible, he says, for one stage to present two rooms or houses; I answer, 'tis neither impossible nor improper for one real place to represent two or more imaginary places, so it be done successively; which in other words is no more than this, that the imagination of the audience, aided by the words of the poet, and painted scenes, may suppose the stage to be sometimes one place, sometimes another, now a garden or wood, and immediately a camp: which, I appeal to every man's imagination, if it be not true. Neither the ancients nor moderns, as much fools as he is pleased to think them, ever asserted that they could make one place two; but they might hope, by the good leave of this author, that the change of a scene might lead the imagination to suppose the place altered; so that he cannot fasten those absurdities upon this scene of a play, or imaginary place of action, that it is one place, and yet two. And this being so clearly proved that it is past any show of a reasonable denial, it will not be hard to destroy that other part of his argument which depends upon it; namely, that 'tis as impossible for a stage to represent two rooms or

For what else concerns the unity of place, I have already given my opinion of it in my *Essay*: that there is a latitude to be allowed to it, as several places in the same town or city, or places adjacent to each other in the same country, which may all be comprehended under the larger denomination of one place; yet with this restriction, that the nearer and fewer those imaginary places are, the greater resemblance they will have to truth; and reason, which cannot make them one, will be more easily led to suppose them so.

What has been said of the unity of place may easily be applied to that of time: I grant it to be impossible that the greater part of time should be comprehended in the less, that twenty-four hours should be crowded into three: but there is no necessity of that supposition. For as place, so time relating to a play is either imaginary or real: the real is comprehended in those three hours, more or less, in the space of which the play is represented; the imaginary is that which is supposed to be taken up in the representation, as twenty-four hours more or less. Now no man ever could suppose that twenty-four real hours could be included in the space of three; but where is the absurdity of affirming that the feigned business of twenty-four imagined hours may not more naturally be represented in the compass of three real hours, than the like feigned business of twenty-four years in the same proportion of real time? For the proportions are always real, and much nearer, by his permission, of twenty-four to three than of four thousand to it.

I am almost fearful of illustrating anything by similitude, lest he should confute it for an argument; yet I think the comparison of a glass will discover very aptly the fallacy of his argument, both concerning time and place. The strength of his reason depends on this, that the less cannot comprehend the greater. I have already answered that we need not suppose it does: I say not that the less can comprehend the greater, but only that it may represent it: as in a glass or mirror of half a yard diameter, a whole room and many persons in it may be seen at once; not that it can comprehend that room or those persons, but that it represents them to the sight.

But the author of *The Duke of Lerma* is to be excused for his declaring against the unity of time; for, if I be not much mistaken, he is an interested person; the time of that play

taking up so many years as the favour of the Duke of Lerma continued; nay, the second and third acts including all the time of his prosperity, which was a great part of the reign of Philip the Third: for in the beginning of the second act he was not yet a favourite, and before the end of the third was in disgrace. I say not this with the least design of limiting the stage too servilely to twenty-four hours, however he be pleased to tax me with dogmatizing in that point. In my dialogue, as I before hinted, several persons maintained their several opinions: one of them, indeed, who supported the cause of the French poesy, said how strict they were in that particular; but he who answered in behalf of our nation was willing to give more latitude to the rule, and cites the words of Corneille himself, complaining against the severity of it, and observing what beauties it banished from the stage.¹ In few words, my own opinion is this (and I willingly submit it to my adversary, when he will please impartially to consider it), that the imaginary time of every play ought to be contrived into as narrow a compass as the nature of the subject will

accidents, and persons of comedy are small, and may be naturally turned in a little compass. but in tragedy the design is weighty, and the persons great; therefore there will naturally be required a greater space of time in which to move them. And this, though Ben Johnson has not told us, yet it is manifestly his opinion: for you see that in his comedies he allows generally but twenty-four hours; in his two tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, a much larger time, though he draws both of them into as narrow a compass as he can, for he shows you only the latter end of *Sejanus* his favour, and the conspiracy of *Catiline* already ripe and just breaking out into action.

But as it is an error on the one side to make too great a disproportion betwixt the imaginary time of the play and the real time of its representation, so on the other side is an oversight to compress the accidents of a play into a narrower compass than that in which they could naturally be performed. Of this last error the French are seldom guilty, because the thinness of their plots prevents them from it, but few English

men, except Ben Johnson, have ever made a plot with variety of design in it, included in twenty-four hours, which was altogether natural. For this reason, I prefer *The Silent Woman* before all other plays, I think justly; as I do its author, in judgment, above all other poets. Yet of the two, I think that error the most pardonable, which in too strait a compass crowds together many accidents; since it produces more variety, and consequently more pleasure to the audience; and because the nearness of proportion betwixt the imaginary and real time does speciously cover the compression of the accidents.

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the meaning of his argument; for as he drew it, I humbly conceive that it was none; as will appear by his proposition, and the proof of it. His proposition was this: if strictly and duly weighed, it is as impossible for one stage to present two rooms or houses as two countries or kingdoms, &c. And his proof this: for all being impossible, they are none of them nearest the truth or nature of what they present.

Here you see, instead of proof or reason, there is only *petitio principii*; for in plain words, his sense is this: two things are as impossible as one another, because they are both equally impossible: but he takes those two things to be granted as impossible which he ought to have proved such, before he had proceeded to prove them equally impossible: he should have made out first that it was impossible for one stage to represent two houses, and then have gone forward to prove that it was as equally impossible for a stage to present two houses as two countries.

After all this, the very absurdity to which he would reduce me is none at all: for he only drives at this, that if his argument be true, I must then acknowledge that there are degrees in impossibilities, which I easily grant him without dispute: and if I mistake not, Aristotle and the School are of my opinion. For there are some things which are absolutely impossible, and others which are only so *ex parte*; as it is absolutely impossible for a thing to be, and not be, at the same time; but for a stone to move naturally upward, is only impossible *ex parte materiae*; but it is not impossible for the First Mover to alter the nature of it.



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